



BOWERY BOY

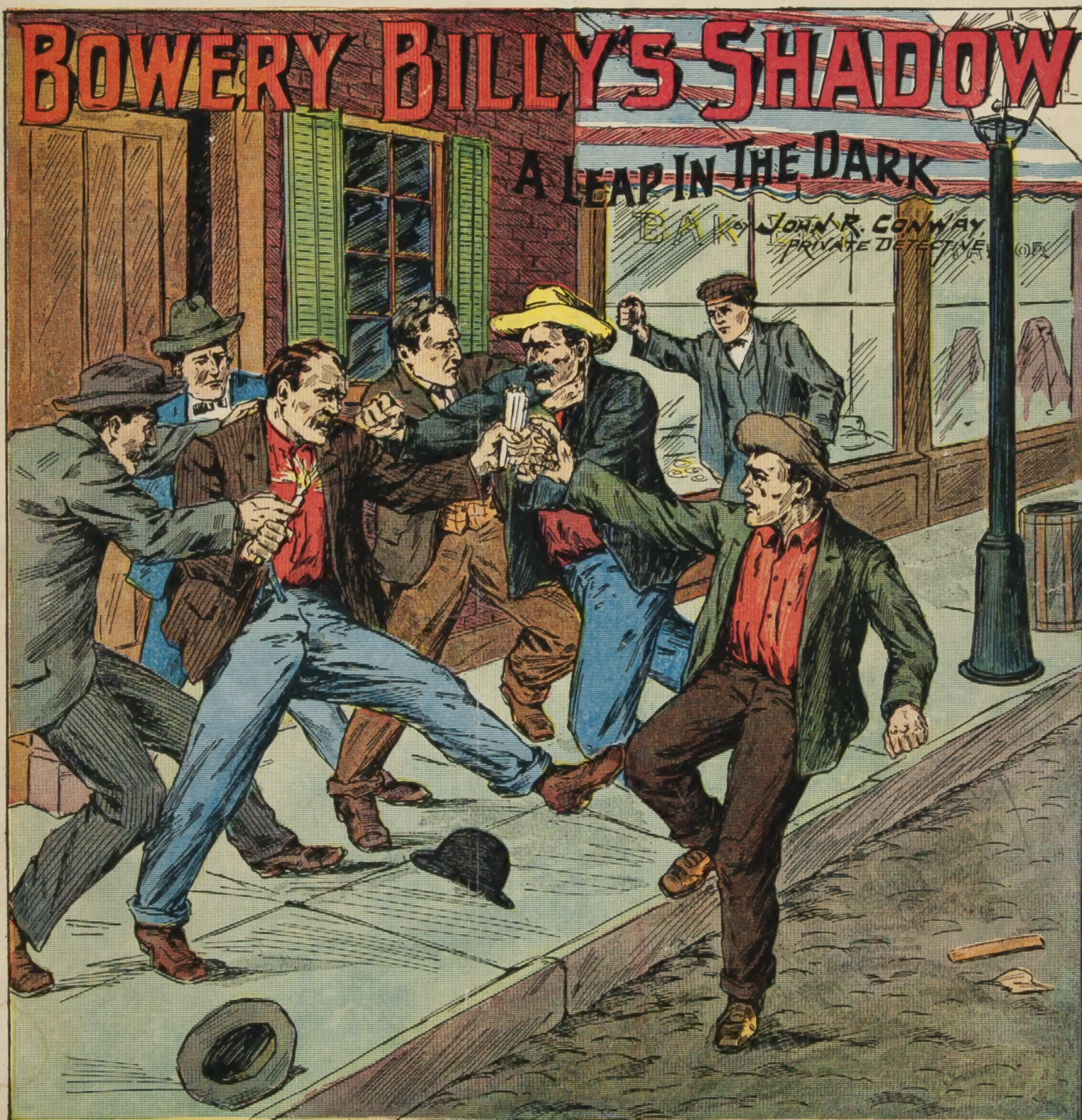
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No. 45

NEW YORK, AUGUST 25, 1906.

Price, Five Cents



Billy dodged to one side, and at the same time made a grab for the candles.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: American lads have always eagerly read stories of life among the street Arabs of our great cities. There appears to be some peculiar charm connected with these scenes among the lowly, even to boys who have never visited New York. To them the Bowery stands for all that is adventurous and mysterious, while its jostling crowds are the various actors in an exciting drama of real life. Believing that an up-to-date weekly would be gladly welcomed, if devoted *exclusively* to stories founded upon the exciting adventures experienced by wide-awake street boys, we have launched the Bowery Boy Library. It speaks for itself.



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NEW YORK, August 25, 1906.

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Bowery Billy's Shadow;

OR,

A LEAP IN THE DARK.

By JOHN R. CONWAY, Private Detective.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Bowery Billy, an adventurous street Arab, whose career in the midst of the whirlpools and slums of a great city brought him in daily contact with such a variety of mysteries and puzzles waiting to be solved, that he just naturally fell into the way of acting the part of a young sleuth, and took the keenest delight in mixing up with trouble, such as can always be found in the neighborhood of the once famous Bowery—a lad keen and shrewd as they make them, bold of heart, and ready at all times to take chances for a friend.

Thede Marston, Bowery Billy's big, red-headed friend, who lends him valuable aid.

Dan Reilly, day patrolman on the Bowery and stanch friend of Billy.

Drascom, the "bad man" of the story, at the head of a secret society with anarchistic aims; a leader feared by his foes and obeyed by his followers.

Kelton, the brother of Marta, hated by Drascom, who fails to draw him into the secret order.

Marta Kelton, who narrowly escapes the toils of Drascom through the persistence of Bowery Billy and the friendly offices of another.

Bernice, Bowery Billy's "shadow," true to the secret order of which she is a member and to its principles, and yet showing up in an unexpected light. She is a puzzle to Billy, and for a while keeps him guessing.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW.

"Green bananers!"

Bowery Billy stopped short and stared about him in the sudden darkness which had fallen like a pall all about him.

The street lights in that locality were none too numerous at best. They were gaslights, and occasionally at a street corner there was an arc-lamp which lighted its immediate vicinity almost with the brightness of day.

But at the moment Bowery Billy was too far from one of the lamps to get the benefit of it. At the moment he had been passing under a gas-lamp which had abruptly gone out.

There were plenty of plausible reasons for the extinguishment of the light. A sudden leak in the gas-main might necessitate the cutting off of the supply for that locality. Or there might be a defect in that particular lamp. In any case, there was nothing especially mysterious about the matter, and ordinarily Bowery Billy would not have thought much about it.

Another light of the same kind had been burning a little farther on on the opposite side of the street. But that, too, had gone out. Nor was this all.

It was a miserable street at best, made up of cheap tenements and occasional cheap shops and saloons situated in basements or on the street floor.

From the windows of these places some light always issued at night, at least, until a late hour. But now simultaneously with the going out of the street-lamps, those within the buildings were also extinguished, and the sudden darkness that fell upon the street was such as to be fairly appalling to the timid wayfarer.

There was no moon, and the sky was overcast. There could not have been a more unfortunate time chosen for an accident of that kind.

Bowery Billy looked ahead of him, then faced about and glanced in the other direction. As far as he could see there was not a single gleam of light, either from the street-lamps or windows.

He started ahead, and, bewildered with sudden darkness, stumbled off the sidewalk curbing and nearly fell in the gutter. Recovering himself, he stepped back onto the sidewalk and groped his way toward a doorway.

By this time he became conscious of an increasing murmur of voices, exclamations of fear and dismay, the opening and shutting of doors, and the sound of shuffling and stumbling footsteps on the stairs and in the corridors, down steps and along the sidewalks. There were cries of fright from women and children, and gruff ejaculations and oaths from men.

"Well, dis is queer," exclaimed Billy.

Just then the door close to which he had paused was suddenly opened, and a young girl starting to come out stumbled against him.

She uttered a slight scream and caught at his arm to save herself from falling.

"Is that you, Arnold?" she exclaimed.

"Naw, it's Billy," retorted the Bowery lad.

Her hand fell from his arm, and she drew quickly away from him.

"Billy—but what Billy? I don't know you. How dark it is, there are no lights anywhere! What can have happened?"

Her voice was low and full of musical tones. He tried to obtain a glimpse of her face.

As his eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness he could barely make out the shadowy outlines of her figure. Her face he could see so indistinctly that he could not tell whether she was plain or pretty. She was certainly young, for her manner of speaking proved that.

"Is der gas shut off inside?" Billy asked.

"Yes. We had only one jet burning and that went out. I tried to light it again, but there seems to be

no gas to light. I tried another burner, and it was the same."

"Der street lights are out, too, and all der windows are dark. And der people are makin' a big racket, and I'm t'inkin' dey're scared. Yer hears der snap of matches, and yer sees dem flashin' all around, but dey goes out, fer der ain't nutting ter light. Cripes, but ain't it dark!"

"It is awful! But what can be the matter?"

"Somet'ing must have happened, so dey shut der gas off from der main," said Billy.

"But what will everybody do? Only a few have lamps, and inside it's so dark that you have to grope around. And hear the people rushing into the street. And what a chance for crime."

"Dat's right, it's a great chance fer der crooks. I t'inks we'd better git out of dis and find out wot's der matter. Likely it's all right in der next street."

"Oh, don't leave me! And yet I don't know who you are."

"I told yer me name was Billy. I'm der chap dat runs der bootblack stand over at der corner of Bayard Street and Bowery."

"Bowery Billy?"

"Sure t'ing. And who did yer t'ink I was when yer called me Arnold?"

"My brother. I was expecting him in every moment. He gets home at about ten o'clock, and it's about time for him."

"Den yer wants ter wait here fer him?"

"I'm afraid he'll miss his way, for I don't see how one can find any entrance so as to distinguish one from another in this awful darkness. I can hardly see my hand before my face!"

"It ain't easy ter find an entrance unless yer use ter goin' blindfold. I suppose a blind man gits use ter it, but when yer takes der light away from us we gits rattled, and we finds der rest of our senses ain't wort' nutting because we ain't in der habit of dependin' on dem fer gittin' around."

"Perhaps the light will be turned on again in a moment. It seems as if everybody was rushing out onto the street, and I don't dare to get into the crowd. Oh, hark! There seems to be somebody fighting right close by on the sidewalk!"

What the girl said seemed to be true. There was indeed the sound of blows, oaths, and groans, and they were close at hand.

The girl shrank back farther within the doorway, and her hand again clutching the arm of Bowery Billy drew him after her.

"Don't leave me!" she pleaded.

"Naw, I won't, for a few minutes, anyhow. I told yer me name, and now wot's yours?"

"My name is Marta Kelton. My brother and I keep

house here in two rooms, and he works over at the ferry. What if this darkness should extend to other streets, perhaps to quite a section of the city? And what if they shouldn't be able to find out what the matter was until morning?"

"It would be tough luck, and dere'd be more robberies and other deeds of darkness dan yer could count. Yer say yer brother generally gits here at about ten o'clock?"

"Yes."

Bowery Billy had a supply of matches, and now he struck one and looked at his watch. But it was not at the face of his watch alone that he glanced by the brief flare from the match.

He obtained a good glimpse of the face of his companion, and he saw that it was a face of more than ordinary beauty and of the most pleasing expression.

The girl appeared to be about sixteen years old, her complexion was light, her features regular, and her hair, which was very abundant, was becomingly dressed.

There was very little air stirring, and Billy allowed the match to burn until the blaze reached his fingers. Then, just as he dropped it, a repulsive face thrust itself toward him, leering at the girl, while a hand was reached out and clutched her arm.

Marta Kelton uttered a scream of terror, and at the same time the flash of light was extinguished and she could no longer see the face of her assailant.

"Cripes!" uttered Bowery Billy. And his clenched fist shot out straight for the place where he had seen the leering countenance of the ruffian.

The blow hit the mark, and the man reeled back with a howl of pain and rage. His hand released the arm of Marta Kelton, and she drew back farther within the doorway, crying:

"Come, Bowery Billy, and let me close the door!"

"I don't t'ink he'll try it again," said Billy.

"You struck at him?"

"Yes, and I hit der mark. If he wants more of der same kind I has a-plenty left fer him."

"I have a small lamp somewhere in the house," said the girl.

"Is dere any oil in it?"

"I'm afraid not!"

"Not much use den. I'm t'inkin' yer'll have ter wait till der gas is turned on unless yer wants me ter go out and git somet'ing fer yer. Der people will dig out deir lamps, lanterns, and candles if dis keeps up a great while. Say, miss, I t'ink I seen a grocer's shop jest over across, and dey're lightin' up candles and lamps in dere. Don't yer want me ter go over and git yer somet'ing, anyt'ing dat'll do fer a glim?"

"Not just yet! I'm so afraid that if you get away you'll miss your way back, and I will be left here alone. You couldn't carry a lighted candle or lamp in the street."

"Der's one reason why I doesn't care ter," said Billy. "Why?"

"Cause der crowd might make a rush fer it. Der's a perfect mob in der street, and dey're howlin' as if dey had lost deir wits."

What Bowery Billy said seemed to be true.

It appeared as if all the tenements and shops had disgorged their inmates, that the people were pouring from every doorway and joining the howling, struggling and groping throng that filled the narrow street.

From a distance Bowery Billy heard the shout of a policeman, and, glancing in that direction, he saw a flash of a lantern in the officer's hand.

The light emitted showed a moving, struggling crowd all around the officer. He was shouting and swinging his club, and he seemed to be quite as much excited as any of those around him. The truth was that he was as much at a loss as anybody to account for the sudden darkness that had fallen upon the scene.

"This is awful!" murmured the girl.

"It ain't very agreeable, dat's a fact."

"I don't see what we're going to do."

"Der ain't nutting unless yer lets me go over across and git some candles."

"But you'll have to make your way through the crowd, and you might be knocked down and trampled under-foot."

"Dat ain't so easy. I'm pretty good at knockin' down meself. I'm t'inkin' I damaged der face of dat cull dat grabbed fer yer jest now."

"What if I'd been here alone?"

"It would have been up ter yer ter cracked him wit' yer own fist square on der snoot. Yer might have broke away from him and shut and locked der door. It's der only safe t'ing fer anybody ter do unless dey can take care of demselves in der crowd."

"I wish I dared to let you go after candles."

"Wait jest a few minutes longer and see if dat cop comes dis way."

They waited a few minutes, but if the policeman approached any nearer the fact promised to be of no benefit to them, for the crowd in the street became more and more dense, and as it surged to and fro, the policeman with his lantern seemed completely snuffed out.

Indeed, in such darkness, a single officer stood small show in an attempt to control the crowd.

To Bowery Billy it was merely a question as to the extent of the darkness. If only that street were affected something would probably be done before very long to remedy the difficulty.

Billy was anxious to find out whether the darkness did or did not extend to the adjacent street. At the same time he was reluctant to leave this girl alone now that she seemed to have been thrown upon his protection.

In most cases, under the same circumstances, he would

not have been likely to chance upon a case of just this kind.

As it appeared, the girl had only her brother to depend upon. It was evident that she was an innocent and respectable girl, and she certainly ought not to be left alone until some one was found to look out for her.

On the face of it, it would not seem to be a great matter merely to cross over to the other side of the street to the little grocer's shop, through the windows of which the glimmer of lamps and candles could now be seen.

But the light which shone dimly forth from the windows revealed a perfect mob of people descending like an avalanche upon the little grocer's shop.

There were shouts and yells, and it looked as if there was a movement on foot to clean out the place.

With some it was simply a scramble to obtain possession of everything in shape of a light that could be found. But in the crowd there were many thieves and common crooks who were ready to seize the opportunity as a pretext for looting the place. And the proprietor had only a boy of about Billy's age to assist him, and could at best make but a poor defense of his shop.

Billy could see plainly what was going on from the doorway where he stood. He could see the proprietor dancing about inside expostulating with the crowd, trying to wait upon those who were willing to pay for the supplies, and trying to restrain the many who were simply seizing everything that they took a fancy to and rushing out without paying for it.

It was a strenuous moment for him. Billy saw him make a rush for the door and try to close it in the face of the mob. But that he soon found it impossible to do. A moment more and he fell back and simply stood as if appalled by the disaster which had overtaken him. A few moments more at the rate things were going and his stock in trade would be exhausted.

Farther on up the street there were other small shops which were being looted by the mob. The conditions were such that nothing like law and order could be enforced.

Billy turned to the girl who, white and breathless with increasing terror, stood close at his side and clung to his arm.

"Could yer tell me, miss, if der is a telephone in der house?"

"I'm sure there isn't."

"Is der one in any of der shops along here?"

"I remember none."

"And I can't seem ter t'ink of a telephone pay-station on der street. If der is one I wouldn't know where ter look fer it in dis darkness. I know der isn't a district telegraph office nearer dan Canal Street. Aw, cripes, dis is bum!"

As Billy spoke he saw a man pushing his way des-

perately toward the sidewalk with a half-dozen candles clutched in one hand, and another, which he had managed to light, held in the other. Billy sprang across the sidewalk and grabbed the man by the arm.

"Give me one of dem candles, cully! Here's der pay fer it."

Billy thrust a silver quarter against the man's hand as he spoke.

For answer the man kicked at him, and Billy had to make a nimble jump to dodge the foot. The money dropped to the sidewalk with a jingle, and the man swore and tried to get away.

Billy dodged to one side, and at the same time made a grab for the candles. He seized two, snatched them away, and the next moment had to fight desperately to retain possession of them, for a half-dozen others had pounced upon him to get the prize.

One of the candles was dropped and crushed under a half-dozen feet. The other Billy succeeded in sliding up his sleeve, and then after a short struggle he got back to the doorway where Marta Kelton breathlessly awaited him.

He pushed her within the doorway, shut the door, and bolted it. Then he lighted the candle, which was only about four inches long and of the common white paraffin variety.

"Dis will help yer some, and if yer go up-stairs and keep yer doors locked I'm t'inkin' yer'll be all right till I can go out and find wot's the matter. Wot's der number of yer door?"

"Two hundred and sixty-six."

"I'll come back as soon 'as I can. Don't yer go outside in any case before daylight. If I comes yer'll hear me knock t'ree times, den once, and den twice. Will yer remember?"

"Yes."

The girl ran up-stairs with her light, and Billy started to go out. But a black shadow rose up before him.

CHAPTER II.

DANGER THICKENS.

It was a time for quick action. Billy let fly with both fists at the shadow, and the momentum of the blows which met no resistance came near to throwing him headlong out upon the sidewalk.

Had he been mistaken? Was it merely his imagination that had made it seem to him that the shadowy form of a man had risen to dispute his passage?

The crowd on the street had not thinned, and the turmoil had increased.

It seemed as if all the tenants of the buildings that lined the streets had been vomited forth to swell the crowd.

There were many women and children who, in their

desperation and bewilderment, had imprudently left the shelter of their dwellings and thrown themselves into the midst of a danger that was far greater than the dense darkness that prevailed within.

With matches being struck and thrown down or dropped still blazing there was the danger of fire. Indeed, there was hardly a peril that could be imagined that the dismal and persistent gloom did not entail.

For a moment Billy hesitated.

He did not fear for himself, but as he thought of the danger of fire he was reluctant to leave the girl alone, feeling as he did that he was actually responsible for her safety.

He stepped down onto the sidewalk, and, as he did so, it seemed to him that he heard stealthy footsteps close behind.

He wheeled like lightning, swinging one outstretched arm about as he did so.

Again it seemed to him that a shadowy form blacker than the darkness vanished from before him. This time it seemed, indeed, that his swinging hand brushed against something like a garment.

"Green bananers!" he mumbled.

He rushed back up the steps, flung open the door which he had just closed, and, once inside, he struck another match.

As the light flared up he was sure that he saw a shadow against the wall in front of him. But it faded so quickly that again he was not certain that it was not an hallucination due to some defect in his own vision.

"I'm t'inkin' der's somet'ing der matter wit' me eyes, strainin' dem tryin' ter see in der darkness," was the suggestion that occurred to him.

And he decided to waste no more of his muscle hammering at shadows. Taking a good look about him by the light of the match, he stepped out again and closed the door. Then, without further hesitation, he descended to the sidewalk and found himself in the midst of the terrified and surging crowd.

Bowery Billy was used to making his way through rough crowds, and he knew that it was utterly useless to work his way through without making an actual fight of it.

This he proceeded to do. When he found his advance disputed by women he used greater care, and, indeed, helped to open a way before them instead of jostling them aside. But through the crowd of men and boys he elbowed, punched, and kicked his way so that they were glad enough to open a passage for him.

Occasionally he would come to a space where the crowd would not be so dense. At such points he would dash ahead until he again found himself in the midst of a struggling and fighting crowd. Then he would join in the fight again, making it a point to punch and

kick just as hard and a little oftener than those around him.

The distance was not great to the corner of the next street, but it was slow and hard work getting there.

When he first began the struggle he noticed that there were others trying to make their way in the same direction.

But, as he approached the street corner, he encountered a dense crowd which had evidently just turned into that street from the one beyond.

This discovery filled him with a sense of dismay.

"Dey wouldn't be comin' inter dis street if der next one was lighted," was his conclusion.

The struggle became more difficult. The crowd was denser, and there was no one to keep them in order.

To make his way against the human tide for the time seemed to be almost impossible. In spite of himself they carried him backward, for they were so densely packed and all advancing against him that he lost all the headway that he had gained.

At last he succeeded in getting into the middle of the street, and there he found the throng packed less closely.

A moment more and he reached the street corner and was glancing up and down the larger thoroughfare.

And there his suspicions were verified.

This street, like the other, was enshrouded in darkness.

There were more shops and saloons and other important places of business on this street, and many, finding that the electric as well as gas lights had been cut off, had lighted scores of candles and lamps, which had been hastily unearthed for the purpose.

He paused in front of a saloon which had made out to show more lights than any other place in the vicinity. A glance in through the doorway showed him that the place was nearly deserted. Billy pushed open the screen door and entered. But he was met by the proprietor, who said gruffly:

"We don't want you in here, for we aren't open for business! I thought that door was locked."

"Jimmy just went out and left it unlocked," said a young chap behind the bar.

"I ain't wantin' a drink, so yer needn't trouble yerself. I wants ter know wot's der matter wit' der lights."

"That's what we want to know."

"Ain't der been any cops along?"

"Yes, one bobbed in here, but he didn't know anything about it. It was information that he was looking for."

"I should t'ink he'd know enough ter telephone ter der lightin'-station and find out."

"He said that was what he had been trying to do, but he couldn't get any answer at the phone."

"Ain't yer got one yerself?"

"Sure thing. But you can't make it ring. All the connections seem to be cut off."

"Der yer know how far it extends—I mean der bum darkness?"

"I know no more about it than you do."

Just then a street-car came creeping on through the darkness. This was lighted, showing that the electric connections for the surface-line, at least, had not been cut off.

Billy dashed out and made a rush to catch the car, which was already crowded by a howling mob of passengers. He managed to get aboard and cling on. The car moved forward for several lengths, and then suddenly came to a stop. At the same time the lights went out, and from the crowd of passengers there went up a perfect howl of dismay.

Bowery Billy realized that the connections supplying power for the car had been cut off like those of the lights.

Billy did not hesitate an instant. He sprang off into the street to avoid the panic-stricken passengers, who, he knew, would throw themselves upon him in another moment in the mad rush to get away from the stalled car.

Keeping to the middle of the street, Billy rushed straight ahead, and as the throng here was not so great, he succeeded in making considerable progress. And so he soon reached another street corner.

And again he was met by the same disappointment.

For as far as he could see there were no street lights, either gas or electric, and all the shops were in darkness as well as the tenements, except for the occasional dull glimmer of lamp or candle.

"Dis is der limit!" muttered Billy.

At the moment a stalwart form brushed against him. And as Billy spoke the person paused and faced him. A dim ray from a lamp in a window across the street enabled the two to recognize each other, and there were mutual ejaculations of delight upon recognition.

"Marston!" cried Billy.

"This is luck, anyhow," retorted the big fellow.

"And can yer tell me, Marston, wot's der matter wit' everyt'ing?"

"How can I? Did you think I'd been shutting off the juice that lights the streets and runs the cars?"

"Where were yer goin'?"

"Well, I left Thistle's rooms about half an hour ago and then went down to see you. As you weren't there I struck across the Bowery, and through this way, thinking it just possible that I might meet you. Then the lights went out, and I'm thinking that I've been going round in a circle ever since. I can't tell one street from another. I'm thinking that I've killed about seven men, nine women, and twenty-three children, for when they've got in my way I've just thrashed around with my legs and arms till I made them move. To put it mildly, I got scared."

"Wot in t'under is der meanin' of it?"

"Search me."

"Is der Bowery lighted?"

"How do I know? It was all right when I left it, and so was the street that I struck into. I've been trying to get back to the Bowery, but I think somebody has moved the street."

"Aw, but I can find der Bowery."

"Not if some son-of-a-gun has moved it. I tell you, Billy, this is giving the crooks their chance. They'll loot everything, and if we don't get relief pretty soon there'll be more murders in this part of the old town between now and daylight than the city can show up in a year."

"Dat's right, Marston. But, say, I'm t'inkin' I'll have ter go back and see der girl wot I left wit'out anybody ter look out fer her just about one block east of here."

And Billy proceeded briefly to state where he had been at the moment when the sudden darkness first fell upon that part of the city.

"You can't find the place again if you try, Billy. And what's the use? There are a thousand other girls in just as much danger as she is. It's up to us to get where they have some light, and the way to do that thing is to go in a bee-line west until we strike a street that's lighted."

"Dat's all right ter say, Marston, but I promised der girl dat I'd come back, and I'm goin' ter do it. I'm t'inkin' dat der two of us can take der girl and fight our way t'rough till we gits her somewhere dat she'll be safe. Der fools down in dat street are t'rowin' deir matches around, and wit' all der Jews and dagoes and der rubbish dey'll have a fire goin' dat will clean out der block. And dat girl's a peach, and she ain't got nobody but her brother ter look out fer her, and der's no tellin' wot will happen ter der brother before he gits ter her."

"Oh, well, I suppose you've picked up somebody that you think you've got to look out for. Maybe we can find a few babies down through there that need protecting, and, if we do, you can load three or four of them into my arms, and I'll toddle along with them and sing them a lullaby. It will help take up my mind."

"Aw, shut up, Marston, and come along!"

"But I feel, Billy, that I ought to be protecting something. Find me a dirty-faced urchin, can't you? I just must have something to protect."

Billy made a plunge ahead, and Marston followed.

But their progress was slow.

Had the streets of the city always been dark as they were then there would have been none acquainted with the locality who would have been confused as to localities. It would seem that Bowery Billy should have been able to locate each street corner and every important locality almost by touch and sound. And yet, as a matter of fact, he was hardly sure what street he was on at the moment.

The darkness was so unusual that everything appeared strange to him. It was as if he had suddenly been dropped into a strange city without a landmark to go by.

He would not have believed that anything could have confused him so. And yet, even the old Bowery, if that thoroughfare were indeed within the afflicted section, would have seemed strange to him.

And so, when he actually came back to the street where he had been when the lights first went out, he was not quite sure that it was the one he wished to find. He hesitated at the corner, and it seemed to him that everything had changed since he was there less than half an hour before. It was Eldridge Street which he wished to find, and at best it was a poorly lighted street.

Along Grand Street, near which he had encountered Marston, numerous surface-cars were stalled the same as the one on which he had been for a few moments as a passenger. And this thoroughfare, so busy by day and never deserted by night, was enshrouded in the same Stygian gloom as that which prevailed in the less important side streets.

And yet it was in the narrower streets filled almost exclusively with cheap tenements that the maddened crowd was the greatest.

"I don't see, Marston, wot's become of all der cops," said Billy.

"They have taken to their holes like gophers when they're scared, and I don't know as I blame them, for fifty of them wouldn't stand any show trying to maintain order in this crowd. It's a case of every man for himself, and those who can't take care of themselves might as well give up the battle. You and I are lucky, Billy, for we are tough and plug-ugly, and whenever we run up against a crook or a gang of them we go them better and come out to the good."

"Say, Marston, can't yer tell me fer sure if dis is Eldridge Street?"

"I don't know, Billy. It might be Fifth Avenue or Broadway for all that I could tell to the contrary."

"I t'inks I chances it, and I knows der number. If we hits it wrong den we tries again."

So they struck into the narrower street, where they found the conditions much worse than they had been in the broader and usually more active thoroughfare.

From every side there came cries for help, screams of terror, and now and then a groan of pain. The worst sound of all to Bowery Billy was the wail of terror from the children.

Side by side Marston and Billy fought their way.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEARCH FOR MARTA.

To find the number two hundred and sixty-six was the first thing that Bowery Billy aimed to accomplish. Ordinarily it would have been the simplest thing in the

world to do. He knew which side of the street to look for it, and he had a vague idea as to the distance from the Grand Street corner.

After having pushed their way through the densest part of the mob, Billy began to look for something by which he might identify the door which he wished to find.

By this time every available lamp and candle that could be found or seized had been put into use. Now and then a man could be seen plunging along with a lantern hugged under his arm. Billy saw one just ahead of them carrying a bull's-eye.

"Marston, we must have dat glim," declared Billy.

"You have spoken, and the glim shall be ours," said the big fellow.

"We holds up der chap and offers ter buy der lantern. I gives him a big price fer it."

"If it is your will, it shall be so," said Marston, who, as a rule, when conditions were the most serious, assumed an air and speech of a serio-comic character.

In another moment they were face to face with the stranger.

The latter proved to be a big burly ruffian, who thrashed through the crowd without mercy for those who were smaller and weaker than himself.

He tried to thrash his way through Billy and Thede Marston. But they stopped and stood like rocks, and he was obliged to come to a halt.

"Say, cully, I gives yer t'ree dollars fer dat glimmer, and here's der money."

Billy flaunted a two and a one-dollar bill in front of the light.

The stranger made a grab for it, and Billy let him have them.

"Now, hand over der glim."

"Go to blazes!" snapped the ruffian.

And he tried to make a break for the middle of the street.

But Billy sprang in front of him, while the man swung for the boy's face with his right fist.

Billy ducked and avoided the blow. Just then Marston stepped into the game, and the ruffian found himself in the clutch of a pair of hands that were like steel.

"Say, let go!" he snarled.

"Hand over me lantern, fer yer've sold it ter me."

"I'd rather give back your money."

"Dat ain't no go. Yer took der cash, and it was a trade. Give up der glim or yer loses it anyhow, and yer gits a twist put inter yer neck dat yer won't git over in a year."

Still the man resisted desperately. He had a reason of his own for wishing to retain the lantern, a reason that he did not care to explain.

But it was no use. Marston began to cuff him with

one hand while he held onto him with the other. And Billy grabbed the lantern.

Marston let go of the ruffian, and, as he did so, the quick eye of Billy caught the flash of a knife which the ruffian had succeeded in getting hold of.

The blade would have been plunged into the side of Thede Marston but for a quick upward swing of Billy's right fist, which struck the man's wrist and sent the knife whirling in the air.

The weapon fell on the pavement, and the ruffian made a spring for it. Marston did the same, and there was a quick, hot tussle that ended in the ruffian being sent sprawling, while Marston got hold of the prize.

"Now, we'll skiddoo," said Billy.

Marston needed no second hint, for he suspected that he might need all the steam that he had in him for fights that might be coming if the mysterious darkness should continue until morning.

Again they moved forward, and Billy directed the rays from the lantern over the doorways as they passed them.

By its aid he was able to make out the numbers, and five minutes later they were in front of two hundred and sixty-six.

"Dis is der place, unless I've been such a fool as ter make a mistake in der street," announced Billy.

They went up the narrow steps and tried the outer door. It was unlocked, and they went in and ascended the stairs.

But, when they were in front of the door where he had parted from Marta Kelton, Bowery Billy exclaimed:

"Green bananers!"

For the door was broken down. It had been smashed into splinters, and the room beyond was enshrouded in darkness.

It was a poorly furnished room, as Billy could see as he flashed the light from his lantern all about it. It was connected with another and smaller room by a door which evidently had likewise been broken open. Neither room had a sign of human tenant. On the lounge in the outer room a large black-and-white cat stood with arched back and bristling tail glaring and snarling at the intruders.

Bowery Billy looked into the face of his companion.

"Your new girl doesn't seem to be here, Billy. She seems to have left," said Marston dryly.

"Say, dis is bum!"

"A statement which I am not inclined to dispute."

"Der rooms have been broke inter and der girl has either skipped or been carried out, and it's a question which of der two t'ings happened."

"And a question that neither of us can answer."

"If she escaped from der cull dat broke in I ain't sure dat she'd make fer der street. I happens ter know dat

dat is der last t'ing she'd do, fer I warned her against it."

"You warned her wisely, for I can't think of a worse place than this street and a mix-up with the crowd for a woman or girl. I suppose there are other rooms and tenements in this ramshackle old building. But I'm thinking it's a slim chance of our finding the girl on the premises."

"But we tries fer it jest der same. Come along."

Marston plunged ahead of Billy, for the lantern lighted the way ahead of them.

As they passed out through the broken door it seemed to Bowery Billy that a shadowy form walked along at his side. He turned his lantern quickly, but, as he did so, the shadow vanished and Billy exclaimed:

"Aw, cripes!"

Marston turned back and stared at the face of his companion.

"What makes you so pale, Billy?"

"I t'inks I'm nutty."

"Why so?"

"Because I keeps seein' t'ings dat ain't here."

"What do you mean?"

"When I was here before, jest as I left der girl I t'ought der was a shadow follerin' close behind me. Sometimes it crossed in front of me, and I turned once or twice and whacked at it, and once I t'ought I hit against somet'ing."

"Likely you did."

"But now I jest t'ought I seen der shadow again."

"And perhaps you did."

"But dere ain't nobody here."

"Then you didn't see anything. It's a plain case, Billy, of your seeing something or not seeing something. If you have a shadow tagging you around I would respectfully suggest that the said shadow be annihilated."

They had turned back into the room, and Billy flashed the light from his bull's-eye so swiftly about them that there would have been no chance for a living being to escape unseen. They went back into the inner room and explored that, even to a small closet which opened out of it.

"I tell yer, Marston, I'm gittin' nutty, and dat's why I see t'ings."

"Well, I'll take care of you, and if you get violent I'll put you in a strait-jacket. Thou hast been my friend, and I will be thine."

Marston linked his arm within that of Billy's, and together they went out again into the corridor. They opened all the doors and explored all the rooms that led out of the corridor on that floor. There were plenty of signs that the rooms had been recently occupied, and yet no tenants could be found. Probably all had joined in the craze to abandon the comparative safety of the tenement to the danger of the mob on the street.

"Der's one floor above dis, and we explores dat," said Billy.

"And little good will it do us," predicted Marston.

His prediction was fulfilled. The rooms on the next floor were as completely deserted as those which they had already visited.

There was still the ground floor which they had not examined. But a further exploration brought out nothing to throw light upon the mystery of the girl's disappearance.

"Now, I don't know wot we can do," said Billy.

"We can give it up. Or, we can range up and down the street and howl the name of the girl on the chance of her hearing and answering. If we only had a megaphone it might do some good. What did you say was the girl's name? If it was only Nellie or some other equally common name there might be a score or so to flock our way in response to our call."

"But der name is Marta Kelton, and der ain't likely ter be a great crowd ter answer ter dat."

"We should hope not."

"But the name is all right."

"Sure. But do we want a crowd of them?"

"Aw, cripes! I t'inks dis is serious enough, Marston, fer yer ter talk sense."

"Certainly. But what if I had not the sense to talk? One cannot speak that which he knoweth not."

They returned to the street-door, and there met a young chap just coming in.

A glance at his face told Billy as plainly as he needed to be told that this was the brother of Marta, for they bore a strong resemblance to each other.

His coat was torn, his head was bare, and there was a smear of blood on his cheek. It was evident that he had had a hard time of it fighting his way through the crowd.

"Who are you?" the young fellow demanded hoarsely.

"I'm Billy of der Bowery, and me friend's name is Marston, and, wot's more, I'm t'inkin' dat yer name is Kelton."

"Yes. But what are you doing here?"

"I was lookin' fer yer sister, Marta."

"Then you know her? But what right have you——"

"Aw, don't git hot under der collar! I happened ter be near here when der darkness hit dis part of der city. If it's any help ter yer let me tell yer dat I'm a police spy and dat I tried ter do a good turn fer yer sister. I advised her ter lock herself inter der house while I went out ter find wot was der matter wit' der lights. I wasn't gone more dan half an hour, and now I comes back wit' me friend, but der girl ain't here."

"Not here?"

"Naw!"

"She may have gone into one of the other tenements."

"She ain't in dis section of der block."

"It can't be so!"

The young man reeled back as if he had been struck in the face.

For a minute he was silent, as if he were trying to realize the significance of the misfortune which had overtaken him.

But he was one of the kind who, when they receive a hard blow, force themselves to realize it all in a moment and then pull themselves together to meet it.

When he took his hands from his face he was as calm as before.

"You say you were here when the lights went out and that you spoke to my sister then?" the young man demanded.

"Yes, I was here den. Of course, I was a stranger to her, but she had heard of me and she was ready ter take my advice when I told her who I was. She told me she was expectin' yer, and dat yer ought ter be here by ten o'clock, but I wanted ter go out and see if der was any light in der next street and ter find out, if I could, wot was der matter. I promised ter come back as soon as I could, and me and me friend got here about fifteen minutes ago. We found der doors up-stairs broken in and der girl gone."

"You've looked everywhere?"

"In der house, yes."

"In the other tenements?"

"Yes."

"Then something must have happened to her, for you say the doors were broken down. And now we don't know where to look, and in this infernal darkness and with that villainous crew filling the streets, fighting, robbing, looting everything, what would happen to her if she tried to get away from here? This is terrible!"

The young man raced up the stairs, and they could hear him hurrying from room to room along the corridors and then up the next flight. He soon returned, and his lips were set with an expression of determination.

"I believe I know who is responsible for this," said Kelton.

"Den he's der cull we wants ter light on if yer knows where ter find him."

"I know where it is possible to find him, that is, if there were a chance to find anybody or anything in this blackness. As I understand it, you are willing to help me in the search for my sister?"

"Sure t'ing. And it's der same wit' me friend here. I recommends him as a fighting-machine. If yer wants anybody smashed, all der stuffin' knocked out of dem, it's Marston dat will do der job wit' neatness and despatch."

"If we can find Dick Drascom I shall be glad to have your friend go to work on him. I feel now as if I should be equal to him myself, and yet I know I'm not. Besides, he will have his crowd with him."

"Well, Kelton, where der yer t'ink we finds him?"

"In a place on this street between Stanton and Houston Streets. But for the darkness and crowds it wouldn't take us long to get there."

"Den if yer says so we tries fer it, and I'm t'inkin' der quicker der better. Have yer got a gun?"

"Up-stairs in my room."

"Git it den. If yer needs it yer goin' ter need it mighty bad. I carries one meself, but one of Marston's fists is more sure fer a knockout at short range."

Kelton ran up the stairs again and soon returned with a revolver. He examined it by the light of Billy's lantern, and then thrust the weapon into his pocket.

"Now, I'm ready," he said.

Marston and Kelton led the way out of the house and down the steps, while Bowery Billy threw the rays from his lantern ahead of them.

As he closed the outer door behind him it seemed to him that it met with resistance, as if a hand on the other side were trying to hold it open. With lightning quickness he turned back, flinging the door wide. And, as he did so, once more he saw the shadowy form flit away from him and disappear like a will-o'-the-wisp!

"Green bananers!"

Billy darted back along the corridor with the glare of his bull's-eye lantern ahead of him. But if he had really seen a shadow it became certain that he could not find the substance.

He returned to the steps where Marston and Kelton were awaiting him.

"What was it, Billy?" Marston demanded.

"Dat shadow again."

"There must be something the matter with your eyes, probably due to the effect of the darkness."

"It ain't due ter me eyes or ter der darkness dat some-t'ing held onter der door when I tried ter shut it."

"Did there?"

"Sure t'ing."

"And you found nothing?"

"Jest nutting."

"It's confounded queer, anyhow. If it was anybody but you, Billy, I should say you had the jimjams."

"But it ain't anybody but me. I wishes jest der same dat somebody else might see dat shadow, and den I would be sure dat I wasn't nutty."

"What is it?" Kelton asked.

Billy briefly explained to him how it was that he seemed to be haunted, while in that place, by a shadowy form that came and went like a phantom.

Kelton shrugged his shoulders.

"I saw it!" he declared, in a low voice.

"When?"

"When I went up-stairs after the pistol. You flashed your light up after me, and I thought it was my own

shadow against the wall. Yet it couldn't have been, for it didn't come in the right position."

"Good!" muttered Billy. "I wanted somebody else ter see it."

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT!

The trio kept close together as they made their way along the narrow sidewalk which for a short distance they found comparatively clear.

As they advanced they observed several dark, shadowy figures keeping pace with them along the gutter and in the street. As Billy flashed his light upon them they would slink back and be lost to view. Then, after a little, they would be seen following on again as if they were awaiting an opportunity to spring upon the three friends.

"Keep your light off of them till they get a little closer, Billy," said Marston, in a low voice.

The suggestion was complied with, and they soon saw the skulkers approaching closer as they were emboldened by the darkness.

Suddenly Marston leaped from the sidewalk and plunged in among them.

Bowery Billy and his companion saw one of the ruffians lifted in the air and swung around over the head of Marston like a club. The feet of the ruffian cut a wild circle and cracked against the heads of some of his companions before they had a chance to make out what was happening.

Two of them were knocked down, and the one whom Marston was using as an implement of offense was thrown into the middle of the street.

In the gloom Marston looked to be fully a foot taller than he really was, and the manner in which he had handled the one whom he had seized impressed them with a vague idea that the darkness had given birth to a big, uncanny imp who was able to clean out the crowd of them.

As Marston dropped his victim he let out an unearthly yell and plunged after the others, every man of whom fled with howls of terror.

He did not attempt to pursue them. In another moment he had joined his companions and seemed to be breathing none the quicker on account of his exertion.

"Things are beginning to happen," Marston remarked mildly.

"And I'm t'inkin' dat dey'll continue ter happen. Now, we goes ahead, fer der way appears ter be clear for a space. I ain't seen a cop in dis street yet."

"It is likely it takes about all there are in the precinct to take care of the crowds in the more important streets. They don't have a force big enough to protect this section of the city when they've no lights to help them. But what's this ahead of us?"

It was Kelton who spoke. They were approaching a dense group of men in front of a shop from which a few lights dully gleamed. As they approached it nearer they saw that it was a saloon. Within there was a dense crowd packed to the very door. Some were struggling to get in, while others were fighting their way out. There were yells of rage, howls of pain, and now and then a gruff outburst of laughter.

Through the window our friends could see the short bar, and that there was as large a crowd behind it as there was in front. They were seizing bottles from the shelves and cigars from the case. There was the crash of breaking glasses, while the proprietor and two bartenders, backed up into a corner, were shouting their vain protests against the wholesale robbery of the place, which was evidently in progress.

"Dat's about der worst t'ing dat can happen," said Billy.

"That's right," muttered Marston.

"The crowd on the street doesn't need that stuff to make them any wilder," said Kelton.

The sidewalk was completely blocked, and, indeed, the crowd extended nearly across the street.

At the rate they were going through the saloon it was evident that the stock in trade would not last a great while. The shelves were already about cleared of bottles, but in another room in the rear there were barrels and casks which were being tapped by the wholesale. The wild crowd was filling itself up at a fearful rate, and what the result would be could be easier imagined than described.

"Dey never ought ter have let dem in if dey had ter keep dem out wit' guns," said Billy.

"They might have kept them out, but now they can't get them out. We'll have to bunt through the crowd and look out for our heads."

"Dat's right."

"Are you ready?" Marston coolly inquired.

"We're ready."

"I lead, and here goes. Look out for the glim, for we'll want that after we get through."

As Marston spoke he plunged ahead, aiming for a point where the crowd was the thinnest.

"The cops, the cops! Clear away!"

It was Marston who uttered the cry. Bowery Billy and Kelton took it up, and, with the big chap in the lead, they waded through the struggling mob which was scattered before them like chaff.

A few bottles thumped them as they passed through. But the chief demonstration on the part of the crowd was in the way of a wild scramble to escape.

Many in the crowd took up the warning cry which had been started by Thede Marston. It passed from lip to lip, and reached the ears of those in the interior of the room.

The result was a panic that resulted in a terrible, fighting scramble to escape from the saloon. All had an idea that a squad of police were about to make a raid on the place, and that the whole crowd was likely to be rounded up and run in at the nearest police-station.

There were many among them who had the best of reasons for wishing to avoid such a calamity. And each one made a fight for himself with little regard for the others who were in the same scrape.

Bowery Billy, Marston, and Kelton, once through the mob, hurried along the comparatively clear space beyond.

"Now how much farther ter der place where yer t'inks yer finds dat Drascom?"

"We're nearly there. Just flash your light along the doors as we pass. The darkness mixes me up."

"Der same as it does me."

"I would hardly know that I had ever been here before. If I turned around two or three times I might start off in an opposite direction and never know the difference."

"Here is Stanton Street," said Billy.

"And Houston comes next. You can look ahead and see no lights, which shows that it is as dark there as it is on Grand Street. I'm wondering how far this darkness extends."

They now moved more slowly, for Kelton was looking for the entrance that he wished to find. At last, he paused and said:

"This is the place. Now we'll wait a moment."

"I don't see any light inside," said Billy.

"But I think we'll find lights just the same in one or two rooms in the back of the building. And there, if anywhere, we'll be likely to find Drascom."

"Yer don't t'ink he'll be likely ter be alone?"

"No."

"Wot sort of a place is it?"

"It's called a sort of club-room. Drascom is at the head of the crowd. There are anarchists among them, and, for that matter, Dick Drascom isn't much else."

Bowery Billy pricked up his ears.

"Den yer knows somet'ing about Dick Drascom?" he demanded, with sudden interest.

"I ought to know something about him. He came to New York with me three months ago. I didn't know, then, what sort of a fellow he was nor what business he was engaged in. After we got here I found that he had plenty of friends that seemed to be expecting him. He tried to get me into the crowd, and when he couldn't persuade me, he tried threats. It was then that I cut him out. He came to see me and my sister several times, and he made love to Marta. I think she always hated him, and she came pretty near telling him so. If we had realized how dangerous he was we might have been more

cautious about getting him into a rage, but we found that out too late."

"And yer made him quit comin'?"

"It was for that that I bought the pistol. He came once after I told him to go, but after I told him that I would shoot him or that Marta would do so if he showed himself there again, he made himself shy."

"How long ago was dis?"

"About two months."

"And der crowd he belongs wit' meets here?"

"Yes."

"Der's good reason den ter t'ink dat he knows wot's become of yer sister. But it doesn't foller dat we finds her here."

"I don't expect it."

"Wot den?"

"I merely hope to find him."

"Dat'll help. But how many are dere in der crowd wit' him?"

"I don't think there were more than a dozen when we first arrived here. But many new ones have joined the society, which is secret. I happen to know that every member is on the lookout to pull in new ones, and in that way it grows pretty fast."

"I knew der was somet'ing of der sort, and dat's der game dat I was pipin' when I come down t'rough here ter-night before der lights went out. It's der first time I've said a word about it except ter Mr. Myrick, who put me onter der scent."

"Then it seems to be rather lucky on the whole that I met you. I've heard of Billy of the Bowery, but mostly from reading the papers. But it strikes me that this darkness is rather more than even you bargained for."

"It knocks me silly. Maybe I'll git used ter it, and I don't t'ink I'm quite so much rattled as I was an hour and a half ago. Give me time, and I gits back me nerve, and now yer've give me somet'ing ter t'ink of, I begins ter know where I'm at. Dis is a queer business, fer when a chap starts out ter be a detective he never knows who he's makin' dance when he pulls der string. Was yer ever in dis place yerself, Kelton?"

"Once, when I first came here, I went in with Drascom, and there were about a dozen others here. I didn't say anything then, but when they said I'd got to be put under oath to reveal none of their secrets, and when I had sized up the crowd, I told them I guessed I would wait a week before I joined them. For one thing, they wanted a little money as a fee, a sort of an initiation, and I pretended that I didn't have it and would have to wait a week for it. In that way I got out, and you may be sure that I didn't show up the next week."

"I wish it had been me."

"Why?"

"I t'inks I would have come around and joined dem. Den I'd been on der inside of der game. Maybe dis is

jest as well, and I don't have ter pay any fee. Has yer any idea dat der's likely ter be many of dem in der rooms ter-night?"

"It's merely a matter of guesswork."

"Den I guesses dat most of dem are out wit' der crowd dat's lootin' der shops."

To the likelihood of Bowery Billy's suggestion Marston and Kelton assented. There were three of them, and, as Bowery Billy had declared, Marston was a fighting-machine, and if caught in a hostile crowd he was better than half a dozen ordinary men.

"I know the way in, at least," said Kelton. "So I suppose it is up to me to lead the way. But I want the rest of you to follow mighty close. It isn't that I think so much of my own precious life, but I don't care to leave my sister the same as alone in the world. In the first place, she thinks quite a lot of me, and it wouldn't make her extra happy to learn that I'd been made way with by the murderous crew under Drascom. I'm just saying this as an excuse for taking decent care of myself, and I don't think that if we get into a pinch I'll give you any excuse for calling me a coward."

"I don't t'inks yer've showed der symptoms of bein' one up ter der present minute. Just show der way, Kelton, and yer won't find dat either Marston or me lags very far behind."

The doorway that Kelton entered bore no number. They ascended three flights, which brought them to the top floor of the building which was one of the few four-story structures in that vicinity. Having reached the corridor on the top floor, Marston and Bowery Billy followed Kelton with noiseless footsteps to the very end of the corridor. There they arrived at a narrow door which bore an iron knocker resembling that of a lodge-room. And here after a brief pause, during which Kelton listened, he gave six raps with the knocker, two at a time with a brief pause between each pair.

The response was immediate. The door was opened, and a man wearing a mask over the upper part of his face appeared in the doorway, and said:

"Is the greeting from friends or foes?"

"From friends of the cause," was Kelton's prompt answer.

"And do you vouch for all as worthy?"

"I vouch for all."

"And how will you answer for their treachery in case they should prove otherwise?"

"With my life."

"So be it. Advance and give the sign."

The guard stepped back, and Kelton, motioning to his companions to follow, advanced across the threshold. Then he paused again, and clasped his hands above his head. After maintaining this position for a brief space he unclasped his hands and let them fall at his sides.

The guard responded in the same fashion, and then

walked backward along a narrow passage which was really a sort of bridge over a court in the rear of the building, and making the only means of entrance to the secret room in the rear of another building on the next street.

Kelton followed a pace or two in the lead, while Marston and Bowery Billy kept on in his footsteps.

Having crossed the sort of covered bridge connecting the two buildings, the guard knocked on another door, which was likewise instantly opened, and without a word being spoken all advanced into a passage which was pitch-dark.

Bowery Billy heard a door open, and a hand resting on his shoulder gently pushed him across the threshold. Then he paused and waited for an instant for further instructions from Kelton.

In obedience to Kelton's instructions, he had turned off the light of his lantern just before the first signal knock had been given, and he had carried the lantern under his coat awaiting the next instruction from the young man who, up to this point, seemed to know the hooks as well as if he was really a member of the secret order.

But absolute silence reigned around him. And Billy of the Bowery, always on the alert, became instantly suspicious.

The next instant he struck a match, and the light flashed up, disclosing his surroundings.

He was in a small, boxlike room without a window, and even without visible means of ventilation. The room contained not a single article of furniture. The walls, ceiling, and the floor were bare and closed in as tight as a tomb.

"Aw, cripes! dis is a trap! And Billy of der Bowery was easy!"

Billy spoke aloud. The bare walls sent back the sound of his voice in a mocking echo.

The next moment Billy had lighted his lantern, which at least made the situation more cheerful. He assumed that the door had been locked upon him, and a trial proved the assumption to be correct. He next made an examination of the door, with the vague idea that he might be able to kick a hole through it. But that hope was dashed upon the first examination, for, although the door was of wood, it was protected by a lattice work of steel bars, which could not have been removed by bare hands.

"Dis is a prison!" muttered Billy.

He wondered what had become of Marston and Kelton, and why they had not been thrust into the room with him. At the same time a vague suspicion came to him that even Kelton might have been playing double.

Bowery Billy did not actually believe this to be so, and yet there was some warrant for his suspecting it.

He raised his voice in a yell that was almost deafening

in the close room. He called the name of Marston again and again. But to his calls there was absolutely no response.

At the same time he became conscious of a peculiar and unmistakable odor in the room. He recognized it instantly, and exclaimed:

"Aw, cripes! I'm all in dis time. Dat is gas!"

He looked above and about him for the source of the gas. And he was not long in finding it.

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

Directly overhead near the center of the room Bowery Billy discovered the end of a small tube, which he knew was the vent of a gas-pipe. There could be no doubt that the gas which was coming into the room proceeded from this.

If the opening could be plugged up the danger would cease. It could be easily plugged if there was any way of reaching it. But it was fully four feet above the highest point that Bowery Billy could reach by standing on tiptoe.

Even by a most nimble jump it would be next to impossible for him to touch the end of the pipe with his fingers. And even if he could do that there was not even the shadow of a hope of his being able to plug the opening.

There was not a thing in the room on which he could stand to raise himself above the level of the floor. And as he flashed the light from his lantern about he made sure that there was not even an open crevice for ventilation.

"Green bananers!" muttered Billy.

His brain worked rapidly. His thoughts seemed fairly to race along the whole gamut of possibilities. In a desperate moment like that, desperate expedients will sometimes present themselves even to the most ordinary mind.

The brain of Bowery Billy was trained at all times, and this was not the first time in his life that he had been in a situation that called for prompt action.

While the odor of gas was perceptible, it was not yet very strong. The influx had only just begun, and it would accumulate the most densely at the top of the room. At the worst, it would take some little time for all the air in the room to become vitiated to the point of danger.

So Bowery Billy would have a few minutes at least in which to act. But at the same time another danger occurred to him, which in itself warned him that if anything were to be done it would have to be done quickly.

His lantern was lighted. As soon as there was gas of any quantity collected in the room the light from the lantern would ignite it, and the space would be filled

with flame. This would soon destroy the oxygen that remained, and the result would be immediate suffocation for Bowery Billy.

The boy ferret did not use up thirty seconds of the precious time in considering all these contingencies.

He pulled his revolver, which was a thirty-two caliber. He fired three shots in rapid succession, directing the aim near the top of the door. The bullets passed through the panel between the steel bars. Then he fired three shots more through the lower panels, and, opening his pocket-knife, he rapidly cut out the bullet-holes, shaving away the wood between them, and soon making an opening large enough for him to thrust the fingers of one hand through it.

He rapidly enlarged the bullet-holes at the top of the door in the same manner. And with his face close to the openings thus made he was conscious of the influx of fresh air.

"Now, dey couldn't smother me in a year, if I kept me face close ter der opening," muttered Billy.

He filled the chambers of his revolver with fresh cartridges with which he was well supplied. Then standing directly underneath the gas-pipe he focused the light of his lantern full upon it, and, reaching up with his revolver, took careful aim at the opening.

By standing on tiptoe the muzzle of the revolver was about three and one-half feet from the vent through which the gas issued. And this was short range.

Billy laid no claim to being a good marksman, but here was certainly an excellent chance for practise.

The first shot struck about an inch from the opening. The second was half an inch nearer, while the third grazed the end of the pipe. The fourth went a little too far the other side, but the fifth struck true as a die into the open vent, and the sixth followed it.

The bullets, striking a curve in the pipe just above the point where it entered the room through the ceiling, plugged the vent tight, or so nearly so that no appreciable amount of gas could enter the room.

Of course, Billy could not be absolutely sure of this, but the probabilities of success were so great and the chances of failure so small that the matter did not worry him any.

He drew a long breath of relief.

It seemed to him that his ears were plugged up by the stunning reports of the revolver in the close room.

The sounds of the shots could hardly have failed to be heard outside. Yet there had been no demonstration in return.

"Dey've got me in a trap, but dey'll have ter t'ink up a new scheme if dey wants ter do me up quick. If dey keeps me here a great while I'll be wantin' somet'ing ter eat and drink. But I can stand it fer quite a number of hours, and I'm t'inkin' it will be a hard look if somet'ing doesn't turn up in dat time."

Bowery Billy noticed that the smell of gas was less strong than it had been a few minutes before.

With the fresh air coming in and the influx of gas stopped, the air in the close room was fresher than it had been when he had first entered.

Billy set his lantern on the floor, and then made an examination of the iron bars that protected the door.

These bars were set into the woodwork at the ends, and Billy judged that they were clinched on the other side.

A trial with his hands, bracing his knees against the door, quickly proved that it would be impossible to loosen any of the bars by means of his strength.

But he had his revolver and knife, and they had already served him so well that he by no means despaired of being able to effect his escape without aid from the outside.

He again reloaded his revolver, and, holding the muzzle quite close to the end of one of the bars where it passed through the woodwork, he fired a couple of shots through the wood.

This gave him space to work with his knife, and within five minutes he had that end of the bar loosened, and a strong pull removed that end of it from its fastenings.

He repeated the operation in the case of the bar next to this one, and, gaining speed with practise, he had the second bar loosened in less time than it had taken to remove the first.

Now he had a space of the door fully a foot square clear of the protecting iron.

With the strong, keen blade of his knife he rapidly cut across the top of this space. A moment more and he had smashed out a goodly section of the woodwork, even splintering the door down below the point where the iron bars had been removed.

Now the work became much easier. With knife and fingers he splintered the wood away from the ends of the bars until he had loosened several more.

Working thus rapidly for fully half an hour while the perspiration streamed from his face, Billy found that he had an opening large enough to squeeze himself through whenever he should think it best to take the chance.

Still, he thought it strange that there had been absolutely no demonstration from his captors.

They could not have failed to hear the reports of his revolver. He had taken no pains to prevent noise in cutting and tearing away the wood and ironwork of the door.

It was probable that they did not suspect that Bowery Billy could find any means of quickly obtaining fresh air, or shutting off the influx of gas, and they doubtless believed that the sounds which they heard were simply those of a desperate and futile struggle for life.

They believed that he would be overcome by the fumes

of the gas long before there could be any successful result to his struggles.

Now that he was sure that he might get out at any time, at least from the close prison room, Billy took the time to breathe and recover from the exhaustion of his rapid effort.

For never before in his life had he worked so hard and rapidly with all his nerves strained up to such a pitch of intensity.

With the cylinder of his revolver filled with cartridges, with air to breathe, and a good light, Billy felt that he had gained a certain advantage which his captors would have to take some desperate chances to overcome.

By way of stirring them up, he reached out through the opening, and fired a shot into the corridor.

Now that Bowery Billy had extricated himself from the imminent peril in which he had found himself, he had time to think of Marston. He had supposed that the latter was at his side at the moment when the door was opened and he was gently thrust into the room. How the big chap had been disposed of was a question that he had no means of answering.

Everything had been done so quietly that no alarm could be given until after Bowery Billy had discovered his own predicament.

Then he had certainly made noise enough. He had yelled at the top of his voice, and then he had fired his pistol altogether more than a dozen times. The sounds even might well have reached the street despite the numerous walls that intervened.

Billy had certainly heard nothing from Marston or Kelton. And as he thought of the latter the question again occurred to him as to whether the young man who called himself the brother of Marta had really acted in good faith in leading them into this place.

"He seemed ter know all of der signs fer gittin' in, and der guard appeared ter be satisfied wi' him," was the thought of Billy. "At der same time, he must have known dat Marston and I didn't belong ter der crowd. I don't see why dey let us in. Of course, it was a trick, and I can't help but t'ink dat it's jest possible dat Kelton knew somet'ing about it. I don't see how he could help it."

Having recovered from the rapid exertion which had greatly wearied him, Bowery Billy decided to delay the final stroke for liberty no longer.

Whether Kelton was treacherous or not, he knew that Marston was true.

The chap with the brick-red hair might be, as he called himself, the fighting-machine, and he was certainly capable of handling easily several men of ordinary size, for when he went into a fight he was like a cyclone sweeping everything before him, and not keeping back an ounce of effort that could be put into the first part of the struggle.

Yet Marston was even more likely to be outwitted than was Bowery Billy. And Billy had been neatly trapped, and it had only been through his quick wits and the fact that he had been provided with implements which had aided him in effecting his escape that he had succeeded in his effort up to this point.

A deadly blow in the dark would have felled Marston just as quickly and just as surely as it could have done if he was a small man. And if such a blow had been dealt, then the fact would easily account for the absence of any demonstration from Billy's big friend.

Bowery Billy closed the slide of his lantern, and, with his revolver clutched in one hand, he crawled through the opening in the door which he had made.

It would not have been large enough for a man of full size, and it was rather a tight squeeze for Billy.

Once out in the passage, Billy paused again to listen.

No sound from near at hand came to his ears.

There came to him a faint murmur from the street. And that was all.

Bowery Billy opened the slide of his lantern, and flashed the light from end to end of the place.

It proved to be what he had thought, a covered bridge-like passage across the rear court between the two buildings fronting upon two streets.

There was a door at each end. There were no windows. Both doors were closed, and Billy made up his mind what to do.

He advanced to the door toward which he had been going at the moment when he had been thrust into the cell-like room at one side.

He cautiously tried the door, and, as he expected, he found it locked. Then he drew back a single pace and fired two quick shots at one of the upper panels.

The door opened outward—that is, from the passage. It was not a heavy door, and it was secured with a common lock.

Billy listened for a moment after firing the two shots. This time he heard sounds from beyond—a gruff murmur of voices, and the sound of footsteps. These sounds increased in volume, and he heard several men approaching the door.

Bang, bang! went Billy's revolver again.

And a yell of pain from the other side, and then the rush of retreating feet. And then Billy ran and flung himself with all his strength and will against the door.

It was shaken by the assault, but he realized that it would not be an easy matter for him to break it down in that way.

He went back to the door at the other end of the passage. He was not greatly surprised to find that it was not locked.

He flung it open, ran along the corridor beyond, entered the first room that he came to, picked up a heavy

chair, and rushed back with it to the door which he wished to break down.

Then he hurled the chair again and again against the door. The third blow broke the obstruction, and Billy of the Bowery rushed through, while at the top of his voice he shouted the single name:

"Marston, Marston!"

Along the corridor beyond he ran, still calling that name. Before he had reached the front of the building he was brought to a stop by an unmistakable response to his call.

Marston, at least, was alive. And it did not take Billy long to locate the door from beyond which the response came.

CHAPTER VI.

BACK TO THE STREET.

Bowery Billy still had the chair on his arm with which he had battered down one door. It was still stanch enough to smash another, and the Bowery Boy detective made short work of the only obstacle that separated him from his friend.

The room beyond was enshrouded in darkness, but the light from Billy's lantern showed him the way. He sprang across the threshold, dropped the chair, and with his knife cut the ropes that bound Thede Marston hand and foot. Then he helped the big chap to his feet.

Bowery Billy had taken in Marston's condition with a single sweeping glance. A large lump was swollen over the big fellow's left eye, and there was a smear of blood on his cheek. Otherwise he seemed to be none the worse for what had happened to him.

"Well, Billy!" said Marston.

"Yer seems ter have been up against somet'ing. And I t'ought yer was a great fighter. Wot hit yer?"

"I don't know. Felt like a locomotive, but it might have been only a light touring-car. The thickness of my skull is what saved me. It hurt, and made me groggy, and I had strange dreams, saw visions and thought thinks. But it seems it wasn't much, after all. What I'm wondering at is why you didn't keep along with us, and get the same kind of dose. But I suppose you heard it coming, or that wonderful instinct of yours warned you of danger. There are advantages and disadvantages about having a thick head."

"Aw, cripes! So yer t'inks dey didn't ketch me?"

"You seem to have gotten out of it if they did."

"Dey didn't hit me wit' a club as dey seem ter have done by yer. But dey tried ter do me jest der same."

"Is this a good safe place, Billy, for us to hold a protracted conversation?"

"I'm t'inkin' it's about as safe as we'll find. I'm prepared ter shoot der first cull dat shows his phiz. I ain't takin' no chances. I shoots first, and axes questions afterward."

"Just as you say, Billy, for I wouldn't presume to do any thinking for you. It surprises me that you were caught, but I suppose you just permitted it, knowing that you could escape whenever it pleased you to do so."

"Dat's where yer makes yer mistake. Let me tell yer der fix I found meself in and how I got out of it, and den yer can figure out whether I was ketched or not. I t'ink I was fer fair."

Bowery Billy briefly detailed the simple, yet clever, way in which he had been entrapped, the desperate peril in which he had found himself, and the original manner in which he had extricated himself from the perilous situation.

"Billy, I think you're a wonder," Marston exclaimed, with impulsive warmth.

"Aw, dat was nutting. Der wasn't any other way out of it, and when a feller sees dat he's all in if he doesn't do der right t'ing and do it quick, he gits busy. If dey had hit me on der head der way dey did you, and den left me in dat place, it would have been me finish."

"That may be. And probably the reason they didn't do it was because they were not ready to give the alarm and bring on the fight with the whole of us at the same time. They could take care of us one at a time, and as you were the most foxy they honored you with their first attention."

"Den yer didn't know when I dropped out of der line?"

"No."

"How long before dey hit yer?"

"Just after we got through the next door. It was mighty dark, but all of a sudden I saw a great light. Probably it was a piece of steam-pipe, or it might have been a black-jack, that they rapped me with. In either case it deprived me of what little sense, reason, power, and moral feeling that I possessed. About their dragging me into that room and trussing me up like a pig for a roast I can tell you nothing, for the operation was performed while I was in a state of blissful unconsciousness."

"Den yer don't know wot become of der rest of der crowd?"

"I heard plenty of footsteps and voices up to a few moments before you called me."

"How about Kelton?"

"Just what I would like to ask."

"Was he wit' yer when yer was hit?"

"He was just ahead of me the last I knew."

"He wasn't beside yer den?"

"No."

"Have yer heard his voice since yer come ter yer senses?"

"No."

"Did yer recognize der voice of anybody?"

"No."

"It doesn't appear, den, dat yer can tell me much."

"Mighty little."

"Did yer suspect dat Kelton wasn't all right?"

"Not a suspect."

"Wot der yer t'ink now?"

"I'd rather hear what you think. My thinker is balled up. My mind is receptive, but it has no thinks worth giving out. I feel as if I'd like to be rocked in a cradle, and have somebody sing a lullaby."

"I'll say dat I t'ought Kelton was square. I didn't see a sign of anyt'ing else. If he wasn't scared about his sister, and if he didn't feel ugly to Drascom, he's a good actor, and he ought ter join a show."

"That's the way it looks to me."

"And yet he knew der way ter git in here, and dey didn't seem ter make no kick against lettin' him t'rough."

"He said he was with them one or two nights, and that he expected to be initiated. That gave him a chance to learn the knocks and signs. It doesn't follow, I suppose, that he was in the plot to put us in the hole."

"I'm hopin' it doesn't. I don't like ter put confidence in a cull, and den not have him make good."

"Yet that's something that happens to us sometimes, the best we can do."

"I've been up against it times enough, but dat doesn't make me distrust anybody dat seems all right any quicker. If it worked dat way wit' me I would be t'inkin' all der while dat I didn't have any friends. I means ter take care of meself, but I'd rather trust somebody too far once in a while, dan to find dat I ain't trusted somebody enough. I ain't got inter much trouble yet by trustin' somebody too much."

"It's the other way with me, Billy. There aren't many in the world that I trust. You know how I feel about you, and I feel pretty sure of my sister. Thistle Tom's all right, though I don't tell him everything that comes into my head. And that's all."

"How about yer brother Jack?"

"He hasn't made good yet. Of course, I know him pretty well, but I can't tell yet what he'd do if it came to a pinch, and he had to choose betwixt himself and me."

"Dat's a pretty tough test, and yer mustn't expect too much of a feller, Marston."

"I'm keeping on the safe side and expecting very little."

"Now, I'm t'inkin' we'd better git back ter der street. Der question about Kelton ain't settled. If he was straight, and we knew it, den it's up ter us ter find out wot dey did wit' him."

"I suppose you haven't forgotten, Billy, what is behind the whole of this affair—the infernal darkness that hit this part of the city making the worst mix-up that you or I ever heard of?"

"I ain't fergot nutting. If der street was all right I

wouldn't be stayin' here talkin' wit' yer as long as we had a chance ter git out. Dis is der bummiest night dat I ever lived, and if we gits t'rough it, and has all our wits when der sun rises, den I'm t'inkin' der won't ever be nutting dat will t'row us down."

"A true word," nodded Marston.

"I'm fer lookin' t'rough der rest of der rooms, and makin' sure, if we can, about Kelton. But I want ter know first how yer are feelin'."

"I'm feeling better every minute."

"Does yer feel strong?"

"As an elephant."

"Dizzy?"

"Not a bit."

"Head pain yer?"

"Like thunder!"

"If we gits up against a gang does yer t'ink yer could fight?"

"Like a streak."

"Dis time I keeps der glim goin', and yer don't git hit in der dark. Dat's where we made der mistake before."

"But Kelton told you to douse the glim, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"What did he do that for?"

"I suppose because he didn't want us ter give ourselves away. If he was workin' ter git inter der secret rooms of Drascom's crowd, den we had ter be careful. Dat was all right, only we took chances. I ain't t'rowin' it up ter Kelton till I'm sure he played double."

"In other words, you suspend judgment, instead of suspending Kelton. If we were to suspend him, that would make a pair of suspenders——"

"Aw, green bananers!"

"Now, I hold myself subject to orders. Once more I look to Billy of the Bowery to furnish the brain, while I put up the brawn. With a return of my great strength I feel a yearning to get hold of something that I may smash. If it only might be the one who hit me over the head with the automobile."

"Yer may have yer chance, Marston."

"But how am I to know him? By the pricking of me thumbs?"

"Aw, talk sense, Marston."

"An impossibility. That is a request that you've made of me upon several solemn occasions. If you were to suspect hilarity from me, if the jokes were really going round, you find me solemn as an owl. But when dignity and sobriety are called for, when strenuosity perches itself like a raven above my chamber-door——"

"Aw, cut it out, Marston! Yer make me tired. Come, and we explores der rooms. I goes ahead wit' der lantern and der gun. You fetch along der chair, and smash in der doors dat we finds locked. We plays der cyclone trick, and rips t'ings ter pieces if dey stands in der way."

They went out into the corridor, and tried the first door that they came to.

It was unlocked, and it opened into a sleeping-room, which was without an occupant.

They wasted no time there, but tried the next door. That was locked.

"Smash it!" was the order from Billy.

Crash!

A single blow with the heavy chair with Marston's strength behind it swept the door out of the way as if it had been made of paper.

But here they found nothing to reward them for their trouble. It was also a sleeping-room, and unoccupied, but had probably been locked as an ordinary precaution.

There was another door opposite, and this was disposed of in the same fashion.

Bowery Billy flashed the light into the room.

The search for Kelton was ended. It was with conflicting feelings that Bowery Billy discovered the young man lying across a tumbled bed, pale, unconscious, and apparently dead. It was proved that Kelton was not treacherous, and that was a relief to Billy's feelings. But that was the only agreeable part of the discovery, and Marston and Billy were soon bending over the fellow, anxious first to discover if he were dead, and, if living, the extent of his injuries.

No attempt had been made to bind his hands and feet, and from this it seemed evident that the enemy did not believe he would make any attempt to escape.

It required a pretty thorough examination for it to be demonstrated to a certainty that there still remained a spark of life in the body of young Kelton. But the spark was there.

He had evidently been struck on the head by the same implement which had been used to knock out Thede Marston. He was of a more delicate mold, and the same blow, or any other injury of the same severity, was more dangerous to him than it could be to Marston.

While Billy worked over the young fellow, Marston went out with the lantern to look for water. He soon returned with a pitcher and glass, and within ten minutes Kelton showed signs of life. In ten minutes more he opened his eyes and looked up into the faces that were bending over him.

"Well, Kelton, yer here," said Billy.

The other was silent, but he looked, wonderingly, from the face of Billy back to that of Marston, and then stared up at the dingy ceiling.

"Dey pretty near knocked yer out, Kelton, ain't dat right?" Billy persisted.

"What does it mean?" the young man articulated.

His voice was feeble, and he closed his eyes wearily as he spoke.

"It means dat Drascom's crowd trapped der t'ree of us. Me and Marston comes out of it der best, but dey

t'ought dey'd done me fer fair. Likely yer don't remember nutting about it."

"Yes, I remember coming in with you. Let me see—I heard a heavy blow, and a fall in the dark. I shouted an alarm, and then I was struck. That is all."

"I'm t'inkin' it was enough, fer if dey'd hit yer again yer'd been all in. But we wants ter git out of here. I don't t'ink yer able ter do much walkin', and me and Marston will take yer down ter der street."

"Marston will do it alone," declared the big chap. And before Kelton could protest, had he been inclined to do so, he found himself lifted in the arms of the young giant, borne out of the room along the corridor, and down flights of rickety stairs with Bowery Billy leading the way with the light. A moment more and they were out upon the street.

CHAPTER VII.

SEEKING FOR LIGHT.

It was Forsyth Street.

This is like most of the other streets in that vicinity, there being several of the same grade that run parallel with each other betwixt the Bowery and Allen Street.

It is the abiding-place of a great number of people who work hard and live miserably. Poverty and uncleanness nurture crime. It is not to any great extent the resort of crooks, and yet, on the other hand, at best, it is poorly lighted, and thieves or thugs may hide or lurk there and mingle unsuspected with the poor and unfortunate.

Even before reaching the street, Bowery Billy and Marston became aware that there was no material change in the conditions that prevailed outside.

Through the windows opening upon the street they could see only blank darkness. And now that they were upon the street, they only beheld, now and then, dull lights from windows, and, scattered at long intervals, dimly burning lanterns hung upon the lamp-posts.

But even these sufficiently relieved the black gloom, so that the panic which had prevailed in the other streets no longer existed.

Like all the other streets on the East Side, Bowery Billy was familiar with this one. A street laborer, whom he knew by sight and by name, lived near the corner of Stanton and Forsyth Streets, and toward the humble tenement, which was this man's home, Billy directed his footsteps.

Under ordinary conditions he would have called for an ambulance and had Kelton taken to a hospital. But he knew that the catastrophe which had been visited upon that portion of the city must have resulted in numberless accidents and deeds of violence, and in the confusion and darkness the authorities and organized charities were already taxed to their utmost limit.

Marston marched along behind Billy, bearing Kelton in his arms like a baby. Billy entered the tenement, and found that the wife of the workman was up and willing to receive and care for the unfortunate young man.

And it is ever so. Those who have the greatest troubles of their own are always the most ready and willing to help others.

The condition of Kelton did not indicate a fracture of the skull or other serious results to the attack which he had suffered. But the shock had been severe, and he would require sleep and several hours of quiet before he would be able to take care of himself.

Before Billy prepared to leave him, Kelton said:

"I seem to be out of it for the rest of the night. I don't feel very bad, but when it comes to muscle I'm no better than a straw man. My legs won't hold me up, and my fingers are so weak that they couldn't pinch the life out of a fly. But my brain is confoundedly active, and I can't forget my troubles. I seem to have led you and your friend into danger, and nothing has come of it except a lot of trouble to you. We don't know any more than we did in the first place about what has happened to Marta. I tell you it doesn't seem as if I could lie here and wait and do nothing at all without knowing what Drascom has done with her."

"It ain't sure yet dat Drascom has done anyt'ing wit' her. It might not be Drascom, fer he ain't der only bum crook dat got busy after der darkness hit der city."

"But he is the only one who could have a motive for making way with my sister."

"Aw, but I ain't sayin' dat I don't t'ink he's der one dat's responsible. Dere ain't much doubt on dat score."

"Well, what will you do next? I've got to trust it all to you, now. I never saw you until to-night, and yet the friend of a lifetime couldn't have used me better. You've saved my life, Bowery Billy, there isn't a doubt of that."

"Dat ain't nutting. If yer sorry I did it I'm t'inkin' Marston wouldn't mind carryin' yer back ter der rooms of dat secret society and leavin' yer dere. Marston is der most obligin' feller yer ever see when yer axes him ter put out his muscle."

"I'm willing to do anything except to use my brain," Marston chipped in.

"I don't think I'll put him to the trouble," smiled Kelton.

"No trouble at all," urged Marston.

"I wonder, Bowery Billy, if you have a definite plan to work out. I always had an idea that you detectives had a trick of jumping right onto a scheme where we of the common sort couldn't think of a single thing to do."

"Aw, sure t'ing. We never makes any mistakes. If we wants a crook we goes and puts our flippers on him, and der first he knows he's pinched."

"I hope, then, you'll get hold of Drascom just as easy."

"I wants yer ter give me his descript."

Kelton did so.

He described a man of about twenty-eight, short and stout, with a dark skin, jet-black hair, and brows and eyes that were deep-set and piercing.

Sometimes Drascom wore a mustache, but at times he would shave it off, and as a consequence much of the time there would be only a three or four-weeks' growth of jet-black bristles on his lips. On the whole, he was a man whose appearance would call for a second glance, for he was a natural leader.

From what Kelton had told him Bowery Billy had decided that Drascom and the secret organization, of which he was evidently the leader, were really socialists with anarchistic tendencies.

For Bowery Billy and his friends, as well as for many others in that part of the city, the night had been crowded with peril and adventure. He had been kept so constantly busy that he had had very little time to work on the problem that lay behind the singular conditions.

Yet he had done some thinking. Points came to him at times like flashes of light. While he had been seeking light of the kind which is usually supplied on the streets of the city, he had likewise sought light upon a dark problem, a sort of light that is always difficult to find.

He did not stop longer then to talk with Kelton. It was evident that the latter needed rest and sleep, and it might be dangerous even to tax him further then.

"I can't make yer many promises, Kelton, but dere ain't any doubt but dat I'll be able ter find yer sister. It ain't easy ter hide anybody in dis city so dat der cops can't find dem. If I spots Drascom we chokes der trut' out of him. When mornin' comes all der cops in der precinct will be on der game, and we don't give up easy, I tells yer dat."

"It may be better that I'm out of it, for it looks as if I'd do more harm than good. It's like a man trying to be his own doctor, or conducting his own case in court—it's the professionals that win out every time."

The time was two o'clock when Bowery Billy and Marston again returned to the street. Within half an hour they had made their way to the Bowery, where, greatly to their relief, they found that the blank darkness that prevailed in other streets in its vicinity did not exist.

The mysterious trick, which had been played for some reason, had not been made to work in that hustling and bustling old thoroughfare.

It was an hour when even the Bowery usually comes as near falling asleep as it ever does between sunrises.

But never at its most busy hour had Bowery Billy and

Marston found a greater crowd than that which thronged the Bowery when they reached it at a little after two o'clock.

The dark side streets had poured its bewildered and terrified throng into the Bowery. Every man, woman, and child, who was honest, had sought the light, and with one accord, as soon as they had gotten their bearings, had bent their steps toward the Bowery.

The roaring overhead-trains were thronged and the surface-cars packed. A dense crowd moved along the sidewalk and even walked in the middle of the street, while every kind of public conveyance, as well as ambulances and police-wagons, clattered over the pavements.

"Say, Marston, dis seems good!" cried Billy, as he stood on the threshold of the street for a moment to gaze on the moving throngs, his eyes almost dazzled by the brilliant lights which flared from the windows of the numerous shops, every one of which seemed to be open for business.

"Doesn't it!" said Marston.

"It makes me feel as if I never wanted ter leave der old Bowery again."

"The same here."

"Now, I wants ter git Dan Reilly."

"He is on the day force, isn't he?"

"Sure."

"Then we'll find him in bed."

"Unless der street where he lodges was hit by der darkness. In dat case dey would stir him up. But he lodges on der other side, and I'm t'inkin' der lights are all right after yer crosses der line of der Bowery."

This proved to be a true prediction, and yet Danny was not abed. The reason for this was that a summons from the precinct-station called him up, as every available man on the force was needed to patrol the dark streets and restore order among the panic-stricken crowds.

They found him making his toilet with his usual care. He had just shaved, and was sopping his smooth cheeks with bayrum. He looked spick and span, and he greeted Billy and Marston warmly.

"What is this that I hear, Billy, about the electric juice and the gas being cut off from half a dozen blocks over beyond the Bowery?" he inquired, as he adjusted his collar and tie before the glass.

"It's jest wot dey say, Danny, der juice and der gas are shut off. And it caught me, fer I happened ter be over der pokin' round on a tip dat I got from Myrick."

"But what's the cause of it?"

"Aw, it was done by crooks. I'm t'inkin' it's der anarchists, wit' some reg'lar crooks in der game."

"Rather a bad business, I should say."

"It's der toughest luck I was ever up against. It's worse dan an earthquake fer mixin' up der people."

"Started a panic probably?"

"Dat ain't no name fer it. Der crowds got crazy, and der crooks got busy."

"When did it begin?"

"At about ten o'clock."

"And have you just got out of it?"

"Der best light I've had is a bull's-eye lantern fer der last four hours."

"Any adventures?"

"Aw, dey ain't nutting. Look at der lump on Marston's head and axe him wot he t'inks."

"Don't ask him," grumbled Marston.

Danny was looking at the big chap as he put on his cuffs.

"What were you doing, Marston, while they were thumping you?"

"I fell gently asleep about that time. Billy came and woke me up. My thick skull saved me from getting a broken head, and his sharp wits pulled him through. A thick head isn't necessarily a poor one. A billy-goat can take care of himself about as well as anybody."

"Tell me about it."

Bowery Billy had plenty of time to tell Danny in detail the adventures of the night. It took Danny a long time to dress, and he took just as much pains if he was going on special duty at night as he would have done had he been appointed to serve on the Broadway Squad at Union Square.

"So that's what fetches you over to see me?" Danny remarked, when Billy had finished.

"I wants yer help. I wonder if der special orders yer has stand in der way of yer puttin' yerself under me?"

"Sure not."

"Den finish gittin' inter yer togs and come along. It's too dark over dere fer it ter make any difference how yer looks."

"In just a minute, Billy."

"One of Danny's shoes isn't laced to suit him," grumbled Marston.

"And den der's one lock of hair dat ain't jest right," laughed Billy.

"Did you know, Danny, that the style of that tie is just four days behind the season?"

"Oh, dry up! You want me to look as if I was going out to collect ashes or rubbish, I suppose."

"Not at all, Danny. We wants yer ter look slick, fer we might have ter introduce yer ter our friends, and we're particular."

"How do you expect to find that girl, anyhow?" said Danny, to change the subject.

"We wants ter explore der buildings where Drascom and his crowd has der rooms. We wants ter pinch somebody dat belongs ter Drascom's society and put dem t'rough der third degree, which I calls der chokin' degree. And den maybe we gits at some facts."

"And you want me along to do the pinching?"

"Yes, and ter lend der moral support of der law. Der majesty of yer uniform gives us tone, and den yer look pretty fine, and yer swings along as if yer meant business. Me own looks don't count, and Marston helps only on account of his size. Yer know yerself he don't look so smart as he is."

"I'm just a fighting-machine—only that and nothing more," droned Marston.

At last, after a final inspection of himself in the mirror, big Dan Reilly, the young policeman, announced himself as being ready for business.

Bowery Billy had brought his bull's-eye lantern along, and, before leaving the Bowery, they had it freshly filled with oil. Danny gave Marston a pistol and took two himself. Then, as they crossed the Bowery and plunged into one of the dark streets on the other side, they felt equal to facing anything that might come their way.

They went through to Eldridge Street and to the entrance by which they had gone in with Kelton, without stopping to reconnoiter elsewhere. Bowery Billy well remembered the knocks and signs which Kelton had used. It was by no means certain that they would find any one on guard in the rooms, and yet Billy had a strong feeling that they would do so. Their adventures, which had occurred earlier in the night, all took place at the Forsyth Street end of the covered bridge which connected the two buildings.

The rooms most used by the secret society were entered from Eldridge Street.

Forsyth Street had been comparatively deserted, but in Eldridge there was still a big crowd. It was more poorly lighted by lanterns than the other, and as yet none of the police, who had been detailed as a special guard to the darker streets, were patrolling Eldridge Street.

Indeed, it was to this locality that Danny had been ordered.

"I'll have to walk through the street once just to see how matters are going," said Danny.

"Likely yer don't want us ter go along wit' yer?"

"Why sure, I'd like to have you, Billy. I don't think we'll have any trouble, for an officer of the force, you know——"

"Dat's der stuff, Danny—yer'll protect me and Marston. All yer has ter say is, skiddoo, and yer clears der street. Der reputation of Danny, der cop, reaches clear across der precinct, and yer presence inspires awe and respect."

Danny pretended not to hear the good-natured sarcasm of Billy, for he knew that he had started in to brag again, and he immediately fell silent.

They had not gone far before they reached the saloon, which Billy and Marston had observed at the time it was being cleaned out by the crowd.

The doors were closed, but there was a light within,

and, through the window, they could see the proprietor leaning dejectedly upon his bar.

Danny tapped on the window with his stick after trying the door and finding it locked. The saloon-keeper caught the welcome glisten of brass buttons and sprang to open the door.

Danny led the way into the place, and Billy and Marston followed. As Billy crossed the threshold he again experienced that queer sensation of some one being just behind him.

He wheeled quick as lightning and saw a shadowy figure just as it seemed to melt away in the darkness.

He sprang after it and once more caught a glimpse of it. It was flitting across the street silently and swiftly. A dim light on the opposite side brought the form into relief, and Billy obtained a better glimpse of it than he had done at any time before.

Danny had taken the lantern, a fact which Billy regretted at the moment. But with rapidly beating heart the Bowery lad pursued the shadow.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE SHADOW.

Billy of the Bowery was a good sprinter.

So was the shadow. There was no crowd in the way at that point. The shadow reached the opposite sidewalk not more than half a dozen paces ahead of its pursuer. It quickened its pace, and so did Billy.

Billy was gaining. A moment more and the boy ferret and his mysterious shadow would be neck-and-neck in the race.

Billy whipped out his revolver.

"Stop, or I shoots!"

The sharp command cut the air like a knife.

Quick as lightning the shadowy form dodged into a doorway and tried to open the door. But it was no go.

The shadow faced about, and the muzzle of Billy's pistol touched the shadow's nose.

"Yer all in!"

Billy's speech was greeted by silence. The mysterious form shrank within the doorway and did not stir.

"Speak, or I shoots!" commanded Billy.

"No, no!" gasped a voice which was unmistakably feminine. The tones were even musical, and Billy stared hard, wishing that he had his light, that there were any means at hand of getting sight at the face of the mysterious being who had followed him so persistently.

"Now yer tells me wot yer've been followin' me fer. I've come wit'in an ace of gittin' hold of yer two or t'ree times, and I begun ter t'ink yer was a black ghost and dat yer vanished inter der air every time I got near yer. But now I'm t'inkin' yer flesh and blood, and if yer makes me doubt it I begins shootin' ter make sure."

Billy had not lowered his pistol, and there was no shake in his voice. He was face to face with the mystery, and he did not intend to let it slip through his fingers now that he had the means of solution at hand.

"I mean you no harm," said the voice.

"Dat ain't tellin' me nutting. Wot are yer follerin' me fer?"

"It is for your good."

"Green bananers!"

"You don't believe me?"

"Nit."

"What reason have you to think otherwise? I've harmed you in no way—I've simply kept a watch on you, knowing that you were constantly hunted by deadly foes."

"Much obliged. But, in spite of all yer trouble, yer didn't keep me from gittin' inter a tight place."

"What do you mean?"

"I came about as close ter losin' me life dis night as I ever did."

"How?"

"I was trapped by Drascom's crew."

Bowery Billy uttered the name of Drascom at a venture. He wanted to see what the effect would be.

There was a low ejaculation from the lips of the woman before him. For a brief space she was silent.

"Trapped by Drascom's crew!" she echoed at last.

"Didn't yer know it?"

"No."

"Willin' ter swear yer didn't?"

"Yes. I would not have allowed it. But I lost track of you—there was a big crowd on the street, and you and the big young man who was with you fought your way through so quickly that I had no chance to follow. From that time until a few moments ago I have not seen you at all."

In this explanation of the part on the mysterious being there might have been some truth. It threw Bowery Billy into doubt. It was not doubt that he wanted, but certainty.

"Yer knows about Drascom and his crowd jest der same," said Billy.

"Perhaps."

"Dat won't do. Say, I wants yer ter come along wit' me. I wants ter look at yer."

"No, no!"

"Yes, yes!"

Billy seized the woman's arm, which she had thrown out from under the black shawl which she wore. The same shawl was worn over her head and fastened together in such a way that it concealed all except the upper part of her face.

She tried to break away from him, but that was not easy to do. He had a grip of iron, and he used it.

He drew her out from the doorway and then deftly

linked his arm within hers. He still held his revolver ready for use, for he had had enough of experience during this night, so that he was not inclined to relax his caution for a single instant.

After a moment she ceased to resist him. She permitted him to lead her across the street and up to a window through which light from a lamp relieved the darkness.

Now, he could distinctly see the portion of her face which was not covered with the shawl. It was a youthful face, and the eyes were full of a magnetic sort of beauty.

"Take dat shawl away from yer face so I can see yer," ordered Billy.

She complied. And he saw a face which, while not exactly beautiful, nevertheless had the charm of intelligence and expression.

Evidently she was about twenty-five years of age. Her complexion was light, except her eyes, which were a dark-brown.

He was sure that he had never seen her face before, unless it might have been by chance in a crowd.

She was clad from head to foot in black, and with a black shawl over her head it was not much wonder that she had been able to flit out of his sight in the darkness.

"I don't see why yer keeps yer face covered—yer doesn't need ter be ashamed of it," said Billy.

"I have other reasons than shame for covering my face."

"I t'ought likely. Now, I takes it fer granted dat yer ain't been shadderin' me der way yer has wit'out knowin' me name."

"You are the one they call Bowery Billy."

"Sure t'ing."

"You run a bootblack stand on Bayard Street near the Bowery."

"Dat's right."

"And you do some things on the side. There is no rosum in the blacking that you use, and you pretend that Rockefeller is a great chum of yours. You have done reporting for the *Recorder-Globe*, and you're the spy and pet of Myrick, the headquarters detective. You have recently been searching for your father, and you're hated and feared by the crooks. You have been in more tight places than I could count. Your friends love you as strongly as your foes hate you, and you would rather fight than eat. You're reckless and cautious, you're shrewd and innocent, you're deep and sometimes you seem to be simple. Am I getting it right?"

Bowery Billy could scarcely credit the evidence of his ears.

This mysterious shadow of his evidently knew him like a book. She knew his faults and his virtues, his strength and his weakness.

"Green bananas!"

"I knew you would say that. Now say, 'great bumble-shutes,' and wind up with, 'aw, cripes.' They're all pet phrases of yours, and you use them when you're pleased or unhappy—it makes little difference which."

"I'm t'inkin' yer knows more about me dan I does about meself."

"I'm thinking so, too."

"But it ain't fair."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know nutting about yer."

"Well, you're trying to find out. I meant to keep out of your way, but you seem to have me fairly caught."

"But yer ain't told me a t'ing."

"Haven't I?"

"Wot's yer name?"

"Call me Bernice."

"But yer has another name?"

"Of course."

"Wot is dat?"

"You'll have to wait a little longer before you hear that. You may threaten to shoot me if I don't tell you, but you wouldn't do it just the same, now that you're not quite sure whether I'm friendly to you or not. After you're really sure I know that, I shall be safe from you."

"Aw, cripes!"

"You had to say it, didn't you?"

Just the glimmer of a smile relieved the stern lines of the girl's mouth, and the smile increased the charm of her face marvelously.

"And I've got ter call yer Bernice and nutting else?" said Billy.

"For the present. And now I want you to let me go."

"Aw, not much. I doesn't know nutting about yer yet. I doesn't have shadders at me heels skulkin' around behind me and rubberin' every move I make wit'out knowin' why. It's up ter yer ter tell me, and if yer doesn't do it I has yer pinched."

"Don't do that, for it will be a great mistake."

"Den tell me wot yer wants of me, why yer foller me around, and all der rest of it."

"I told you I did it to protect you."

"Dat ain't sayin' why. Yer knows somet'ing about Drascom and his gang—and, say, yer knows why der gas and electricity was shut off in dis part of der city wit' all der trouble it's made. I has yer pinched, and den yer has ter tell."

Bowery Billy was getting more, and more excited.

All that the young woman had said so far only made her mission, her purposes, whatever they might be, more mysterious than they had been in the first place.

The brain of Bowery Billy, excited by his talk with the girl, tantalized by the mystery, had never been more active. And when in that state the keenness of his wits became phenomenal.

In response to his last words the young woman, who had called herself Bernice, had become silent. This to Bowery Billy seemed like a confession that his charge was true.

And that suggested another startling suspicion.

"Bernice, yer has ter tell me der trut'. Der first I seen of yer was when I was wit' Marta Kelton on dis street at jest about der time dat it first got dark. Ain't dat right?"

"I believe so."

"Den I left der girl ter go and find out wot was der matter."

"Yes."

"Did yer foller me den?"

"Not far. I was afraid we would get in where the light would show you my face and that I would be caught."

"And yer stayed behind in dis street, knowin' dat I would come back?"

"Yes."

"Den yer knows wot became of Marta Kelton. And yer tells me. By cripes, yer've got ter tell me!"

The young woman was silent.

"Come, Bernice, speak, fer it goes hard wit' yer if anyt'ing happens ter dat girl dat yer can help."

She drew a quick breath before answering.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOW'S SECRET.

"I've always heard, Bowery Billy, that you were a very sharp young man, but I never dreamed that I should be caught by you," said the young woman at last.

"Come, no bluffin', and I ain't fishin' fer compliments!" snapped Billy. "Tell me wot yer've done wit' Marta Kelton, and be quick about it. I has a cop right over here waitin' fer yer. I'm t'inkin' I'll let him pinch yer, and dey axes yer der questions over ter der police-station."

Billy was evidently angry. The girl could see that there was nothing in the way of a bluff in this last remark of his, for he was too much in earnest to resort to a mere scare.

He had about made up his mind that whatever the purpose of this woman might be, she was in part responsible, not only for the darkness with all its results which had fallen so mysteriously on that part of the city, but likewise for the disappearance of Marta Kelton, and whatever might have befallen her as a consequence.

If this were so, then it was no time for trifling.

Despite the charm in the girl's face and voice, if she was responsible for all these iniquities, then she was not deserving of mercy or any further show of consideration than would be given to Drascom himself under the same conditions.

Again Bowery Billy was drawing the girl toward the point where he had left Marston and Dan Reilly.

Indeed, it was probable that his friends would be looking for him, for he left them to go in pursuit of the shadow without a single word of warning.

"Wait, I will tell you!"

"Tell quick den, or in yer goes."

"I saved the girl from Drascom myself."

"Aw, course yer did. Dat's a likely yarn. But yer mighty shy about tellin' der good t'ings yer do, and I finds it jest as hard ter make yer own up ter dem as if yer was at der bottom of all der mystery. Ye're too modest and yer needs ter brace up. It will do yer a lot of good ter talk wit' der captain at der station. He's a great feller ter take der shyness out of der women crooks."

"Wait till you hear me before you condemn me. Can't you see that I must take care of myself, that I must protect myself against one side as well as the other? You may be sharp and shrewd, Bowery Billy, but you are too swift when it comes to jumping at things. You're bound to have it that I'm on the dark side of the game, and you aren't willing to give me fair play. Now, what if I should take it into my head to refuse to tell you a thing? You know it's mighty hard to make even a woman speak if she resolves to be silent."

This retort from the shadow caused Bowery Billy to realize that, after all, it was possible for him to be too hasty. Threats were well enough in dealing with the lower order of crooks. But if this young woman was a crook she was not of a common sort, and she would have to be dealt with more cautiously.

Persuasion might go further in her case than an attempt to frighten her.

"Aw, keep cool, Bernice," advised Billy.

"That is really what I wanted to advise you to do. You have been doing very well with me, and if you'd only kept on you would have found me willing to do the fair thing. When I told you that I'd been shadowing you for your own good I spoke the simple truth, and you'd no right to believe otherwise until you had proved something against me."

"But yer wouldn't answer me questions."

"I tell you I have more than one thing to think of. For me to tell you all that I know about this affair is a more serious matter to me than to you, and I can't plunge headlong into a confession. I have something at stake, and you must expect that I shall take care of myself."

"Dat's all right. But, on der other hand, der's only one t'ing fer me ter do, and dat is me straight duty. I promised Marta Kelton dat I'd look out fer her. When I had ter leave her fer half an hour I come back and found dat her rooms were broken inter and dat she was gone. Den I see her brother, and I promises ter find

her fer him if it can be done. Now, wot if one of der reg'lar cops had ketched yer shadderin' him der way I did, der yer t'ink he'd stand here on der street and chew der rag fer fear dat he wouldn't be givin' yer fair play?"

"I suppose not."

"Naw. He'd run yer in wit'out sayin' a word. He'd made yer wear der bracelets, and he wouldn't have said t'ree words ter yer. I gives yer fair play, but I ain't bein' fooled. I've been tricked too many times, and I ain't so easy as I seem."

"I suppose you're right. Just the same, if a regular policeman was dealing with me, and he did what you say he'd do, he wouldn't make out so well as you are doing. Wild horses couldn't drag a secret out of me if I once refused to tell it, and it is because I'm friendly to you and to you alone that I'm giving you this chance. I've no particular love for the police in the city of New York."

"All right, den. Dis little talk helps us ter understand each other, and while yer can't blame me fer havin' me doubts yer'll find me fair and square if yer only shows up a straight deal."

"Now, I will answer your question."

"About Marta Kelton?"

"About Marta Kelton."

"Den yer knows where she is?"

"Thanks to me, she is safe. I intended to tell you, for I've got to get her off my hands, anyway, since I've decided to show you favor."

"Der yer mean ter say dat it was you dat took der girl from der rooms?"

"I was there when it was done, and she was taken to a room of my own as a place of security and locked up. It was done by Drascom's men, two of them, with Drascom himself. As you know, there was an awful mob on the street at the time, and there was small chance of their getting the girl through that howling, fighting crowd almost the entire length of the street to the place where Drascom wished to have her taken. My rooms were only two doors north of the tenement occupied by the Keltons, and I suggested that she should be taken there, with the understanding, of course, that her security be guaranteed in the interest of Drascom."

"I begins ter see der point."

"He was glad enough to avail himself of my offer, and at the same time it was the only way that I could think of that had a chance of protecting Miss Kelton. I had already made up my mind that she should be safe from the clutches of Drascom."

"Den yer wasn't really working fer Drascom, after all?"

"Not in that deal. I might favor him in some things where individuals are not concerned, but not in everything."

"Den der girl is safe?"

"The girl is safe."

"But Drascom knows where she is, and he won't let her stay dere a great while?"

"The understanding was, that he was to allow her to remain there until to-morrow night. For him this night is a busy one. But as he trusts me you may imagine that he may look to me to make good, and if I play him false there will be something doing."

"But yer goin' ter step out of it. Yer ain't goin' ter run wit' der crowd dat follers him. Yer don't belong wit' dem."

A peculiar smile flitted across the face of Bernice.

"How little you know about me, Bowery Billy. Now, about this girl's safety, for I judge that is the first consideration for you at present."

"She has got ter be looked out fer, and she mustn't stay in a place where Drascom can find her."

"You will wish to take her from there to-night?"

"Sure t'ing. Show me der way at once, and der won't be any lost time."

"Wait! This must be done in the way that I direct."

"How is dat?"

"So that it may not appear that I have been false to my pledges."

"Cripes! Den ye're pledged ter dat rascal?"

"Don't ask me to tell you too much. I've agreed with you to guarantee the safety of Marta Kelton, and I will make good. But you must ask no more."

"Aw, den yer makes yer agreement wit' me and ties it wit' a string?"

"I've tried to look out for your safety and for you personally. I'm willing to do what I can, but for the police of New York I'll not do one thing. Understand that, Billy of the Bowery, for Bernice, the Black Shadow, will stand by her principles just as firmly as the crowd that has Myrick at police headquarters behind them."

Billy now understood the truth.

This strange young woman, who called herself Bernice, the Black Shadow, was a member of the secret society of which Drascom was the head.

She was a coworker with him.

Drascom's plot against Marta Kelton was a private matter of which she did not approve, and she would not become a party to it. And, furthermore, to Bowery Billy himself she was friendly.

Bowery Billy was not in just the situation that he liked.

He was connected with the police of New York, and with them lay one of his principal duties.

The safety of Marta Kelton was important, and if he were to act entirely according to personal choice he would not have hesitated an instant about sacrificing public interests, which he was supposed to serve, to the private one which lay nearest to his heart.

There was only one way out of it.

It was not the first time that his duties had seemed to conflict. Most police officers in his position would have played double. They would have promised anything to the girl to gain their ends and played false to her at last.

This, Billy was too scrupulous to do. He would have to be crafty, he would have to match his wits against hers, he must win at all hazards, but at the same time it must be a square deal all around or he would have none of it.

Bernice was watching his face, as she had no trouble in doing in the light that shone from the window.

"Well, den," said Billy, who had spent only a fraction

of a minute in deciding how he would act, "we takes care of Marta Kelton der first t'ing. She must be got out of dis street and inter safe quarters wit' a hustle. Come, show der way."

"Not too fast, Bowery Billy."

"But it's got ter be fast. Me friends are waitin' fer me, and dey wonders wot's happened. I've spent more dan a quarter of an hour already jest talkin' wit' yer, and now we're goin' ter do somet'ing."

"But I want you to promise me one thing."

"Wot is it?"

"That you'll not betray me to Drascom."

"Aw, I promises yer dat. Now, come erlong."

"It must appear that the room where she is held was broken into by force. You can easily manage that."

Billy saw the point.

"Show me der place and I won't trouble yer ter unlock der door. I smashes it in."

"Come, Bowery Billy, for I'll have to trust you."

They were not far from the entrance to which the young woman had referred.

The crowds in the street had thinned out, and, as Billy and the young woman hurried along, the bootblack detective saw a stalwart policeman crossing over from the opposite side. He stopped to disperse a knot of men collected in the middle of the street. Bernice saw him coming and clutched the arm of Billy.

"Remember that I'm trusting you," she said, in a low voice.

"If yer straight wit' me I won't have yer pinched, so yer needn't worry."

"But in my present make-up, if an officer were to meet me, he might take it into his head and detain me as a suspicious character. You must not allow that to occur."

"Nobody will stop yer if I tells dem not ter, fer most of der cops knows me, and if any of dem doesn't I shows dem me badge."

In a moment more they were at the street entrance toward which their footsteps were directed. The outer door was locked, but the woman opened it with a latch-key, and Billy found himself again in darkness, while his companion drew him forward toward the staircase which it required no light for her to locate.

Bowery Billy still carried his revolver ready for instant use in case of need, for there was always the chance of treachery, and he did not entirely trust his companion. Indeed, the possibility had occurred to him at the very beginning that she might be leading him into a trap.

The chance of rescuing Marta Kelton was just the sort of bait to be thrown out to him if he were to be made the victim of such a design.

They had to go up only a single flight. At the top they paused, and the girl asked:

"Have you matches?"

"Sure t'ing."

"Then strike one, and we will find the door."

Billy did as requested. They advanced together, the boy still on the alert for the chance of treachery which at all times and places he had to look out for.

"Yer has a key ter der door?" Billy asked.

"You were to break it down."

"But I can't do it wit'out somet'ing ter break it wit'. Unlock der door and we lets out der girl; if she's dere. Den we comes out, I fetches a chair, yer shuts der door and locks it, and I smashes it in. Dat will fill der bill."

"Very well—that will do. But see that you make good."

The young woman unlocked the door and flung it open. At the same time Bowery Billy struck another match.

CHAPTER X.

THE LEAP IN THE DARK.

As Bowery Billy and his companion entered the room, the young woman leading the way, while Billy held aloft his lighted match, an exclamation of mingled surprise and delight came from some one at the other side of the room.

At the same time Billy saw Marta Kelton advancing toward them, shading her eyes from the light to which they were unaccustomed on account of the intense darkness with which she had been surrounded for several hours.

"Bowery Billy!" the girl cried, in delight.

"Sure t'ing. We gits yer out of dis in a hurry."

At the same time Marta glanced at the one clad in black and drew back, hesitating.

"But that woman—she was with them when they locked me in here!" she exclaimed.

"Don't let dat worry yer, fer she is wit' me when we lets yer out, and dat proves dat she's yer friend. Come, hurry up, fer we wants ter git away from here before der's any hitch ter bother us."

Billy seized the girl's arm, and the three of them walked out together, while he dragged a chair along. Without a word Bernice, the shadow, closed and locked the door.

Then Billy swung the chair aloft and dealt several cracking blows against the door. And he made short work of it.

Another match was lit to make sure that the appearances were such as to deceive Drascom if he were to return to his prisoner.

"It looks now as if somebody come and found der door locked and maybe heard a call for help from der girl inside. Den, of course, dey smashes in der door. Dat makes it look easy fer dem ter guess how she escaped, and dey won't suspect dat anyt'ing was given away."

"They may suspect just the same. But they can prove nothing, and the appearances are all right. The rest of the chances I will have to face."

This was spoken by Bernice as they groped their way back to the stairs and descended again to the street.

"Now, Bowery Billy, I've done my part, and I will have to leave you to take care of yourself and of Miss Kelton. There are now policemen in the street, and I suppose your friends are near, and I don't think I need to tell you that you will have to be very cautious until you can get back to one of the lighted streets. For, let me warn you, there is more than a chance that you meet Drascom or some of his followers within a short time. They are everywhere."

Billy still held on to the arm of Bernice.

"Why does yer want ter leave us?" he demanded.

"You need me no longer."

"But yer needs me. Yer've done us a friendly turn, and now it's fer us ter stay by yer. Der street ain't safe fer an honest woman, and yer've proved dat yer honest."

"I've proved that I'm friendly to you and that I wish to save this young lady from her danger. That is all I've proved and all I'm bound to prove. Now, our lines part."

"Aw, cripes! Does yer mean ter tell me dat yer t'inks it's up ter yer ter stick ter dat Drascom? Does yer count him as yer best friend?"

"He is not my friend at all. If he knew what I had just done my life would not be worth a straw, for the penalty of treachery to him is death."

"And yet yer sticks ter him?"

"Not to him, but to the cause."

"Ter wot cause?"

"The one for which he and his secret society stands."

The young woman spoke with sudden eloquence. Her voice was low, but it was full of earnestness, and under the dim light of the lantern, which had just been hung lighted upon a lamp-post, Billy observed the flash of strength and feeling in the girl's eyes.

"Aw, green bananers, but I t'inks yer nutty," said Billy.

"Yes, they think we are all out of our minds—either that or deliberate criminals."

Billy was no longer in doubt as to the purposes and convictions of this young woman.

She was an anarchist.

"Yer brought darkness onter der city, yer tied up der cars, yer cost a lot of der people a lot of money. At der same time yer've caused innocent people ter be murdered, people wit' small shops or a little money dey've worked hard fer ter be robbed, yer've caused young children ter be trampled on and killed, and innocent women and girls and hard-working people to go inter a panic, and all fer wot? Jest ter git yer revenge on society. It's a great t'ing. Maybe yer believes it, and dere may be some others in der business dat swallers der bluff and t'inks dey're workin' in a good cause. But der most of dem are jest workin' it fer a chance ter rob and kill. Dat's wot Drascom is doin' it fer. If yer honest I ain't blamin' yer, but I tries jest der same ter show yer der foolishness of it, fer I tells yer straight dat yer'll never win out, and dat every man and woman of yer dat work in wot yer calls der cause will git pinched and pay der penalty, and it's Billy of der Bowery dat will never quit workin' in der other cause dat he t'inks will make yours look like t'irty cents. Yer've done me and dis girl a good turn. Now I'm tryin' ter do yer a good turn by warnin' yer ter git out der business. Ter pay fer wot's happened dis night yer'll hear somet'ing drop, and yer wants ter stand from under."

The tones and speech of Bowery Billy were as full of eloquence as had been those of the young woman who called herself the Black Shadow.

It was plain that she was affected by his words.

The manner in which he had depicted the injury which had been done to the poor and innocent people presented to her an aspect of the case which, strangely enough, she had thought little of before.

"Yes, there's a dark side," she admitted.

"Der ain't nutting else."

"But many times, in order to do a good deed and accomplish good ends to a great many people, injury has to be done to a few. So, probably, I will have to be sacrificed to the cause."

"Aw, green bananers, der results will be rotten. Der'll

never be any good ones. Yer whole crowd will git pinched, and den der cause will go ter t'under. But dat won't wipe out der harm yer've done. Now, come along Bernice wit' me and me friends and help us ter clean out der black crew dat's made up of such scoundrels as Drascom. Come!"

The young woman hesitated.

But not in a moment, nor by a few eloquent words and logic that ought to convince, could she be persuaded of her error.

For her there would have to come a more bitter experience. And that experience was closer than she even dreamed.

"No, I must go!" she said, in a low voice.

"T'ink of it den before yer git in any deeper. I'd stand by yer if I could, and dat's wot I'm doin' when I tells yer wot's comin'."

"I know that you mean all that you say, Bowery Billy, and I like you none the less for it. You stand for one cause and I for another, and yet we may be friends. Is not that so?"

"Sure t'ing."

They clasped hands at the street-door, and then, as if she were afraid that she might not be strong enough to carry out her purpose, she turned and fled from him, vanishing in the darkness like the black shadow which she called herself.

Marta Kelton clung to the arm of Bowery Billy, trembling on the threshold of liberty, only half-comprehending the significance of what she saw and heard.

"Who and what is she?" exclaimed Marta.

"She belongs ter der same secret society wit' Drascom. It's only der outside of her dat's black, and her nature is white. It's a pity, but der ain't nutting dat I can do."

"She led you to where I was hidden?"

"Yes."

"Then she didn't wish me to remain in the power of Drascom?"

"Naw."

"And yet in a way she stands by him?"

"She t'inks it's her duty. I t'inks she's nutty. But we can't waste any time on her, fer I wants ter git yer out of dis street. Now, we moves on."

They hurried back toward the saloon where Bowery Billy had so abruptly left his companions to go in pursuit of the shadow.

As he reached the place he stared at the window and door in consternation. The lights within had been extinguished, the window was broken, and the door was open wide.

A moment before, just ahead of him, he had observed the twinkle of lanterns hung upon the lamp-post. But now all these were gone, and a darkness as black as that which had prevailed at the beginning once more settled upon the narrow and dingy street.

At the same time he heard the rat-a-tat-tat of a policeman's club on the sidewalk.

It was a signal. Billy started ahead, drawing his companion after him.

Suddenly a cry burst from his lips. By a desperate effort he pushed his companion backward, and she heard him say:

"Back—don't foller me!"

That was all. The force of his push caused her to retreat several paces. She staggered against some steps,

and there, breathless and trembling, not knowing whether to retreat or advance, wondering what had happened, wondering at the meaning of his command and the backward thrust by which he had broken away from her, she stood listening, staring into the darkness, yet hearing and seeing nothing.

The cause of it all may be explained in a few words.

In hurrying forward Bowery Billy had suddenly felt the sidewalk give way under his feet. Had he been alone he might have thrown himself backward and so saved himself from taking the plunge into the abyss which had opened before him.

But his thought was for his companion, and he had pushed her backward with that warning cry, and, in so doing, had compelled himself to leap down into the darkness that yawned beneath him.

He fell headlong and struck upon a mass of bricks and mortar, and for a brief space lay half-stunned.

But he soon recovered himself, sat up, struck a match, and looked about him.

And then, from close at hand, he heard the sound of a familiar voice.

"It's Bowery Billy!" cried the voice.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

It was the voice of Marston.

"Bowery Billy, sure!" cried Dan Reilly.

And then a flash of light from the bull's-eye lantern, which Billy had left in the possession of Danny, flared in Billy's face.

He stumbled out from among the fallen bricks from a caved-in sidewalk and confronted his friends. For a moment they stared at each other in bewildered silence. Then Billy exclaimed:

"Green bananers!"

"I must say that you take a queer way of coming back to your friends," drawled Marston.

"And I must say dat me friends have chosen a queer place fer receiving me. Wot's der meanin' of it?"

"Oh, it's easy to explain. The infernal crowd that seems to be running things in this part of the city smashed into that saloon about three minutes after we got inside. There were just two lamps burning, and they were smashed. Then the place seemed to fill up. I pitched in and tried to fight my way out, and in the darkness I succeeded in knocking Danny onto his back and cracking my own head against a post. Then I quit being useful and permitted myself to drift with the crowd. While my wits were slowly coming back a light flashed on me, and then I was shoved down some steps, Danny was flung after me, a trap-door was shut over us, and a locomotive placed on top of it—if it had been anything lighter I should have lifted it off—and there we were. It was a sort of cellar. When we got to feeling a little better and had tried in vain to lift the trap we explored our quarters. We explored them out to here which, as it appears, is under the street. I judge that we've been here about three days, but possibly it's longer. And you take a short cut, push a hole through the sidewalk, and come down to pay us a visit. Awfully kind of you, Billy, but it was rather sudden."

While Marston gave a humorous turn to the adventure, he had, nevertheless, stated the exact truth.

It was no time then to ask questions.

"Now, we gits out of dis!" ordered Billy sharply.

"But how? We're about ten feet below the street, and I for one am shy of wings."

"Stand under der edge and I climbs onter yer shoulders. Dat gits me out. Den yer boosts Danny up, and I t'ink we can manage ter git yer out somehow. If we can't, yer can stay here."

"Grand scheme!" said Marston.

It was carried immediately into effect. At the same time several policemen, attracted by the rapping which Billy had heard, came up with their lanterns. And they were not long in getting Marston out of the excavation.

Billy hastily explained to them the situation, and then, seizing a lantern, he ran back in quest of Marta Kelton.

Luckily she had not stirred from the position which she had taken after the sudden disappearance of Bowery Billy.

A few words explained to her the mystery of his action, which had seemed so unaccountable.

And now, under the protection of the police and the light of morning, which the members of the secret league did not have the power to extinguish, swiftly dawning and illuminating the scene, Marta Kelton and hundreds of others, who were innocent victims of the strange plot, had nothing more to fear, for the time at least.

The girl was taken to a place of temporary safety, and early in the morning word was sent to her brother to assure him of her rescue.

At the same time, Bowery Billy sent to the central office a full report of all that he had discovered, leaving a similar report at the precinct-station.

Within an hour Eldridge Street, and the vicinity of the ruins of the secret league, fairly swarmed with police officers. A great number of arrests on suspicion were made, and several of those arrested made confessions implicating others, so that, within a few hours after the welcome daylight, it could be said that the anarchists' society, of which Drascom was the leader, was effectually crushed.

Drascom himself was not found for several days. It was Bowery Billy who succeeded in tracing him then to a miserable hiding-place in Chinatown.

Yet there was a considerable number of his followers who were not suspected, and, consequently, they were not caught. Through their machinations Drascom was rescued from the police while he was on his way from the precinct-station to headquarters. What became of him then it would require more work to discover. And in that work Bowery Billy was to take a leading part.

Only to Mr. Myrick did Bowery Billy tell all that he knew concerning Bernice, the mysterious Black Shadow, whose only deeds were not those of darkness.

It did not take long for them to find out how the means of lighting that section of the city had been cut off.

The plans of the plotters had been carefully laid. Gas-mains and electric-wires had been simultaneously cut at various points, the moment for committing the act having been exactly agreed upon in advance.

Before another night the damage was repaired, and the danger of another night of terrible darkness, with its trail of panic and crime, was prevented.

The brother of Marta Kelton was sufficiently recovered from his injury to join his sister early in the day. They had little desire to go back to their old quarters in

Eldridge Street, and a new and better tenement was found by the advice of Bowery Billy only a short distance from Billy's own lodgings.

For Bowery Billy it had been a case full of adventure, but there was less of real detective skill required for this part of it than was usually the case.

But, while this plot of the anarchists was balked, the escape of Drascom, as well as the disappearance of Bernice, the Black Shadow, as she called herself, left a sense of insecurity in the minds of the police and those of the citizens of that part of the city who knew of the revelations which had been brought out, and which demanded more work of the most careful and searching character on the part of Myrick and Bowery Billy.

Of the results of the quest for Drascom, and the final uprooting of the seeds of anarchy which had been sown, it will take another story to tell.

Bowery Billy dropped in to see Marston, and told him of the last developments in the affair. The big chap listened and smoked without comment.

"I wish, Marston," said Billy, "that you would cut out der bum trade dat yer've tied yerself up ter and go wit' me and Myrick. We needs a fightin'-machine."

"Thanks," grunted Marston.

"Yer finds der biz light and profitable. Yer has a chance ter do a good turn ter yer friends and ter t'row it up ter yer enemies. Yer don't have ter keep a close account of yer time. If yer gits t'rashed and are laid up fer repairs yer time goes on jest der same."

"Thanks."

"Shall I speak ter Myrick about puttin' yer on?"

"Sure."

"And when can I call fer yer to go on ter der next case wit' me?"

"In just one hundred and forty-two years. I would shade that down a year, but for other engagements. You see I have some notices to work out, and some little personal affairs to settle up. I want to make peace with my heirs, and also to enjoy a few quiet years before settling down to the strenuous life as a steady thing. That's all, Billy, and I'm a heap obliged to you for your offer. You might have Myrick put me on the pay-roll at once so that I may get used to that part of it."

"Say, Marston, do yer suppose dat girl will cut out der black shadow business now? And will she quit runnin' wit' der bum crowd dat t'rowed der city into darkness?"

"Ask somebody that understands women. I don't. Possibly you mashed her, for she spared you. It is the usual way. The women crooks are all tender of you, Billy."

"Aw, green bananers!"

And Billy became silent. For it was true that he could not forget the beautiful face and low, sweet tones of Bernice, the shadow.

Was he to see her again? And would she persist in the pursuit of what she called her duty?

Time would tell.

THE END.

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